ZVI GRILICHES
DEPT. OF ECONOMICS
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

THE Public Interest

NUMBER 84, SUMMER 1986, PRICE: $4.50

No, Welfare Isn't Really the Problem

Charles Murray

Are Teachers Underpaid? — *Myron Lieberman*

The Berkeley Youth Wars — *Gail L. Zellman & Steven L. Schlossman*

The Battle Over Gun Control — *Don B. Kates, Jr.*

Deficit Delusion — *Laurence J. Kotlikoff*

American Farm Subsidies: A Bumper Crop — *Elmer W. Learn, Philip L. Martin & Alex F. McCalla*

Research Report: Religion in School Textbooks

Paul C. Vitz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE Public Interest

NUMBER 84, SUMMER 1986

CONTENTS

No, Welfare Isn't Really the Problem	*Charles Murray*	3
Are Teachers Underpaid?	*Myron Lieberman*	12
The Berkeley Youth Wars	*Gail L. Zellman & Steven L. Schlossman*	29
The Battle Over Gun Control	*Don B. Kates, Jr.*	42
Deficit Delusion	*Laurence J. Kotlikoff*	53
American Farm Subsidies: A Bumper Crop	*Elmer W. Learn, Philip L. Martin & Alex F. McCalla*	66
Research Report: Religion and Traditional Values in Public School Textbooks	*Paul C. Vitz*	79
Current Reading		91
Contributors		96

THE PUBLIC INTEREST (ISSN-0033-3557) is published quarterly by National Affairs, Inc. and appears in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter issues. Its office of publication is located at 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022. Subscription price: $18.00 for one year; $36.00 for two years. Add $2.00 annually for Canadian and foreign subscriptions. Unsolicited material cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Second class postage is paid at New York, and at additional mailing offices. © 1986 by National Affairs, Inc. Postmaster: Please send all changes of address to: Public Interest Subscription Dept., 20th and Northampton Streets, Easton, PA 18042.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editors
Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer

Publisher
Warren Demian Manshel

Publication Committee
Martin Feldstein
Harry Kahn
H. J. Kaplan
Harry McPherson
Daniel P. Moynihan
Leo Rosten
Martin E. Segal
Stanley Simon
Arthur L. Singer, Jr.
Roger Starr
Paul H. Weaver
James Q. Wilson

Managing Editor
Daniel Casse

Assistant Editors
Peter McFadden
Gideon G. Rose

Assistant to the Editors
Rita Lazzaro

Associate Editor
Mark Lilla

Consulting Editor
Michael Andrew Scully

Editorial Office
10 E. 53rd St., New York, NY 10022

Subscription Department
The Public Interest
20th & Northampton Sts.
Easton, PA 18042

Newsstand Distributor
Bernhard DeBoer, Inc.
113 E. Centre St., Nutley, NJ 07110

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No, welfare isn't really the problem

CHARLES MURRAY

DAVID ELLWOOD and Lawrence Summers's article "Is Welfare Really the Problem?" (Spring 1986) exemplifies a continuing problem that clouds debate about the underclass. On one side are scholars like myself who have advanced over the last decade explanations for illegitimacy and chronic unemployment that include welfare among their causes. Our accounts have generally been expository and speculative. On the other side are scholars who have been attempting to demonstrate that welfare *per se* does not cause illegitimacy and chronic unemployment. Their accounts have generally been quantitative and presented as refutations of the critics.

The defenders of welfare's good name are in a sense correct: Welfare all by itself *isn't* really the problem. But neither has the debate been joined. The models they "test" are stick-figure caricatures. But, still by the same token, if those of us who are critics do not like the way they deal with our arguments, what way would we propose instead?

Illegitimate births in poor communities, perhaps the most crucial of the problems associated with the underclass, provide a case in point that I will use for this presentation. My approach to the problem could also be used to explore the reasons behind chronic unemployment, delinquency, and drug dependency.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE IMPLIED CAUSAL MODEL that Ellwood and Summers examine in their commentary—as do virtually all other defenders of the welfare system—is one in which the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC) payment causes women to get pregnant and have babies. One direct cause, one direct effect. Women get pregnant to get money, and the larger the welfare reward, the more children single women will have. If the reward is reduced, the number of births to such women will be reduced in tandem. Such hypotheses are easy to knock down, as Ellwood and Summers demonstrate: Illegitimacy rates are similar in states that have widely varying AFDC payments; the illegitimacy ratio continued to rise in the 1970s despite the fact that inflation was eroding the real value of AFDC benefits; and so on.

But hardly anyone who takes a moment to think about the problem would propose this model in the first place. Suppose that instead of asking, "Does welfare cause illegitimate births?" and then rushing to find a measure, one stands back and contemplates why on earth a single young woman with no income would conceive, carry a fetus to term, and then keep the baby to raise when she has other options (abstention, contraception, abortion, marriage, adoption) available to her at each step of the process. Let me suggest an alternative model with four successively more complex, but also more realistic, variations.

THERE IS NO MYSTERY about why a young woman might want to have a baby. Nature has made her physically ready for intercourse and pregnancy, and she may well believe that a baby will bring her love and fulfillment. One might rather ask: Why have so many affluent young women been successfully persuaded to wait until they have a husband? (Illegitimacy rates in affluent communities are extremely low.)

For a poor young woman who has not been indoctrinated with the moral imperative of marriage, who is not going to college, and who is not going to have an interesting job, why not have a baby? Why not do this natural thing? Viewed in this light, welfare does not *bribe* poor women to have babies, it *enables* them to do so. For the young woman who is not pregnant, "enabling" means that she does not ask, "Do I want a welfare check badly enough to get pregnant?" but rather, "If I happen to get pregnant, will the consequences really be so bad?" For the woman who finds herself pregnant, the question becomes more poignant: "Even though I do not have a husband and even though I have no money, am I really forced to abort this child or give it away?"

If "enabling" is a more realistic conceptualization than "bribe,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

several testable implications seem to follow. One is that the concept of "enough" comes into play. At some very low level, the welfare package is so small that no woman will think she can support a baby on it. If every woman had precisely the same threshold definition of "enough," then illegitimacy ratios would be discontinuous as the welfare package increased. It is more reasonable to assume that women's threshold definitions are different but bunched within a relatively small range, so that at some point there is a bump in the "enabling effect" as the welfare package reaches a point where any poor woman can reasonably decide that the package is large enough for her to take care of the baby by herself if she must.

Another implication is that the focus on AFDC as a synonym for "welfare" is wrong. The appropriate measure of welfare will not be the size of the AFDC payment (the bribe) but the size of the entire welfare package (the enabler). It does not make any difference where the money comes from; only if the total resources are enough to get along. Still another implication is that a great deal will depend on whether a young woman *perceives* that the money is enough to enable the behavior. Thus, for example, calculations are likely to be based in part on local standards of living and whether other women in the neighborhood are managing to get along, not just on the raw purchasing power of the welfare package.

THESE IMPLICATIONS, which seem themselves straightforward and unremarkable, drastically change the way that one appraises the available data. If welfare bribes single women to have babies, then it makes sense to compare the illegitimacy rates in stingy AFDC states and generous AFDC states and to be surprised that there is little difference. But if welfare *enables* single women to have babies, the comparison therefore focuses on the total welfare package. With so many sources of cash and in-kind welfare, this has in recent decades become difficult to do, but the GAO did so in 1978 with surprising results. Despite the dramatic differences in the size of the AFDC payments across states, the differences in the values of *the total packages* were modest. Using the GAO's example, poor young women in a stingy AFDC location (New Orleans) and in a generous AFDC location (San Francisco) were looking at nearly identical choices relative to the local economy. As of 1978, welfare packages provided 66 percent of the local median household income in New Orleans compared to 65 percent of the local median household income in San Francisco.[1] Moreover, in both cases the raw amount

[1] Based on a GAO study of 1978 benefit levels, "Public Assistance Benefits Vary Widely from State to State, But Generally Exceed the Poverty Line" (Washington: Government Printing Office, November 14, 1980), pp. 19-20.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of purchasing power is plausibly beyond the threshold of a reasonable poor woman—in 1978, according to GAO estimates, more than $10,000 a year for a San Francisco woman with a baby looking at California prices and almost $8,000 for a New Orleans woman looking at Louisiana prices. It is no surprise, then, that one finds little difference between the illegitimacy ratios in California and Louisiana. Nor should it be surprising that erosion of the real value of AFDC payments has had little effect on illegitimate birth ratios. As long as poor women perceive the total welfare package as providing "enough," they might reasonably choose welfare as a means of doing something they might, *ceteris paribus*, like to do anyway. Inflation in the 1970s and 1980s has left the total benefit package well above a plausible threshold of "enough."

In contrast, there was during the 1960s a very large change in the size of the welfare package. In 1959, when the welfare package was essentially limited to AFDC, the average payment provided only 25 percent of the median income in Louisiana and 29 percent in California. Nationwide, the average annual total payment to AFDC families in 1959 was only $1,300—less than $3,000 even in 1978 dollars. Furthermore, in 1959 (unlike 1978) this amount could not be supplemented by income from a job, and the woman could not live with a man without risking loss of all her benefits. It would be no surprise if a reasonable poor young woman in 1959 thought that, all in all, the welfare package failed to reach the threshold of "enough."

It may be noted for the record that time-series analyses which match illegitimacy against welfare benefits conclude that welfare is the villain after all.[2] But the point is not to defend any particular analysis and its results. Rather, I am suggesting that the data being used to prove that welfare is innocent are not exculpatory once they are considered in light of a model that more closely reflects the way a real, live young woman who is pregnant and poor might look at the welfare option.

BUT PUTTING THE ISSUE in terms of a "real, live young woman" brings us back to the need to broaden the model beyond the direct effects of welfare payments on the utility functions of young women. A real, live young woman is going to be affected by all sorts of other things as well.

Chief among these other things is likely to be a man. At the same time that women were becoming enabled to support a child without having to rely on a man, men in poor communities were becoming

[2] See, for example, C.R. Winegarden, "AFDC Effects on Illegitimacy Ratios: A Granger-Causal Analysis." Working Paper UT-86-01, University of Toledo.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

less reliable. A realistic model must consider the possibility that these two phenomena are related. George Gilder was one of the first to state what the relationship might be, arguing that in poor communities a major effect of welfare has been to change the male role and consequently to change male behavior.[3]

At an individual level, a man uses a woman's welfare as a way of getting along—sometimes living wholly off the woman, probably more often using the woman's apartment and other benefits as a supplement to his own income. At the least, he is not compelled to support the child in the household. This makes it easier for him to leave a job, to behave in ways that get one fired, or to delay acquiring a new job, all of which in turn contribute to his longer-term unemployability. At a community level, the hypothesis is that the existence of a large number of women on welfare leads to changes in peer values among young men. Getting a woman to support you confers status. Conversely, the status formerly associated with "being a good provider" disappears—even when the man is employed, he is not the pillar of support for the family; the welfare system is. Gilder further argues that these conditions have profound psychological implications for males in that they create circular effects.

To simplify a rich argument: The existence of an extensive welfare system permits the woman to put less pressure on the man to behave responsibly, which facilitates irresponsible behavior on his part, which in turn leads the woman to put less reliance on the man, which exacerbates his sense of superfluity and his search for alternative definitions of manliness. When welfare recipients are concentrated, as they are in the inner city, these dynamics create problems that extend far beyond the recipients of welfare. Community values and expectations of male behavior are changed, and with them the behavior of young men and women who never touch an AFDC check. The defenders of the welfare system are prone to sanitize their estimates of effects: When a single young woman in the inner city has a child and does not go on welfare (as often happens), it is inferred that welfare is not implicated in her behavior. This set of hypotheses argues otherwise, focusing on the fact that she *does* bear the child.

BUT WELFARE all by itself truly is not the problem. As one tries to develop a model that approaches reality, it is necessary to deal with a proposition that has barely been recognized let alone tested in the debate over the underclass: The environment in which a

[3] George Gilder, *Visible Man* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

young poor person grew up changed in several mutually consistent and interacting ways during the 1960s. The changes in welfare *and* changes in the risks attached to crime *and* changes in the educational environment reinforced each other. Together, they changed the incentive structure facing young people and they changed status rewards associated with behaviors that make escape from poverty possible. In this third version of the model, these additional hypotheses seem especially important:

Education. One obvious hypothesis regarding education is that the deterioration of inner-city education left girls with fewer perceived options to compete with having a baby. The less obvious hypothesis outlined here is that a series of reforms crippled an important deterrent function that schools formerly served and instead facilitated the fashionability of teenage pregnancy.

Schools in poor neighborhoods traditionally have been a primary dispenser of status rewards for youngsters, from the prestige of being a cheerleader to the prize of a high school diploma. Schools also formerly served as the validator of conventional morality. A female student who was pregnant or had a child was, at the least, stigmatized and was often expelled in disgrace. In treating her this way, the school deterred pregnancy by girls who wanted to get a diploma or who were fearful (as most adolescents are) of being separated from their friends. It buttressed a united front of institutional disapproval (along with parents and church) among the institutions likely to play the largest roles in an adolescent's socialization. And by expelling pregnant girls, the school physically segregated the girls who did not get pregnant from the day-to-day classroom and schoolyard influence of girls who did.

Beginning in the mid-1960s, a concentrated effort was made by the reformers to keep schools from acting in these punitive ways toward pregnant girls, and these efforts were largely successful. Indeed, many inner-city schools now provide special services available only to pregnant girls and young mothers. If, as is commonly reported, pregnancy has become a high-status thing to do in some inner-city schools, the phenomenon may not be completely mysterious: Schools once helped make such behavior scandalous and exacted the kinds of prices that adolescents are loathe to pay; now, they do not.

Crime. In inner-city communities where the increase in crime was greatest, the hypothesized effects of this increase on illegitimacy are at once indirect and large. At a specific level, access to income from the underground economy influences the role of men. A man who can make money from a hustle is less attached to the labor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

force, more likely to end up in jail, and is not the kind of man that a pregnant young woman of sense will rely on. She might, with good reason, decide it is better for her to rely on welfare than to pressure such a man into marriage. At a more general level, a community that subsists on illegal sources of income and that is victimized by widespread violent crime is socially disorganized in crucial ways. To put it roughly, good folks no longer set the standards. In some cases they are physically intimidated from setting standards (witness the situation in many housing projects); in others, the role models for the youth are not blue-collar working men who raise families but hustlers. In such communities, the social stigma against illegitimacy that used to exist in poor working communities is impossible, because in lawless communities the people whose values would produce that stigma cannot be in control. The soaring crime rate in the late 1960s is not irrelevant to the soaring illegitimacy ratio.

THESE HYPOTHESES already exceed the capacity of quantitative policy analysis. It is hard to imagine, for example, that anyone can trace with structural equations the web of connections that might link policy changes in law enforcement, increases in crime, losses of informal social control, changes in norms, and increases in illegitimacy ratios. But the purpose of this essay is not to establish the questions that might be answered, but the questions that ought to be kept in mind when examining smaller pieces of the puzzle. James Q. Wilson made a similar point in these pages when he argued that the development of character in the citizenry must be a central concern of public policy, despite the looming difficulties of doing so.[4]

In that spirit, let me suggest a fourth elaboration of the welfare model. The hypothesis is that the effect of the social reforms of the 1960s on a specific problem such as illegitimacy springs not only from discrete changes in incentives and status rewards, but also from a larger effect on the formation of character among poor young people, and especially black poor young people.

Perhaps the best place to start is with the young people themselves. Three patterns of behavior are familiar to the teachers, pediatricians, probation officers, and social workers who work with poor youths. One is that of the passive bystander. Two pediatricians put it this way: "One of the most difficult and frustrating scenarios faced by the practitioner who works with adolescents is the fifteen- or sixteen-year-old who comes to find out if she is pregnant. When

[4] James Q. Wilson, "The Rediscovery of Character: Private Virtue and Public Policy," *The Public Interest* No. 81 (Fall 1985), pp. 3-16.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked what she will do if she is, she replies, 'I dunno.' When asked what she will do if she is not pregnant, one gets the same response —with perhaps a 'nothin different' added."[5] A second pattern is the youngster who refuses to acknowledge that anything is her fault. Somebody or something else is always to blame, no matter what the nature of her transgression, including pregnancy. She is not just inventing these excuses: She really believes that to hold her responsible is an injustice.

The third and in many ways the most worrisome pattern involves the poor youngster who is not a "problem" in the usual sense. She may study hard in school and have high intelligence, but she has almost no working understanding of the relationship of cause and effect in daily life. Her aspirations are vaulting—she wants to go to Harvard, wants to be a surgeon. But her understanding of what it takes to get from here to there is missing. She has very little sense of the standards that apply in the outside world; she does not understand that thoughts of Harvard are absurd if she has never read anything but comic books. She does not think in terms of a sequence of outcomes leading to a goal but of one great big outcome that will or won't occur. Most characteristically, she exhibits very little belief that she is to some extent in control of her destiny—that *her* decisions about *her* behavior will affect *her* future. In her own way, she is as passive as the pregnant teenager who says "I dunno" and as convinced of her own inefficacy as the hostile excusemaker.

THIS BRINGS US back to the relationship of character to social policy. A central element of good character, as Wilson used the term, perhaps the fundamental element, is acceptance of personal responsibility in two related but distinct senses. The first is the belief that one controls one's own behavior and, in general, controls one's own destiny—"internal locus of control," as psychologists call it. The other is the obligation to bear the consequences of one's own actions. In this context, the disparate reforms of the 1960s had a common vector. What many of these reforms shared (in varying ways and degrees) was an assumption that people are *not* in control of their own behavior and should *not* properly be held responsible for the consequences of their actions. The economic system is to blame; the social environment is to blame; perhaps accidents and conceivably genetics are to blame; but people—specifically the poor and disadvantaged—are not to blame. They are victims in the grip

[5] Robert W. Blum and Michael D. Resnick, "Adolescent Decision Making: Contraception, Abortion, Motherhood," *Pediatric Annals* 11 (October 1982): 797.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of larger forces. Rhetorically, this message was conveyed most loudly and emphatically to black youths.

The reforms translated this message into specific policies, each with its own effect. A shadow effect of public housing is that a child grows up in a world where the decision about where one lives is in the hands of an anonymous housing authority. A shadow effect of reforms to keep youthful offenders out of correctional institutions is to blur the link between wrong behavior and bad consequences. A shadow effect of reforms to deemphasize testing in schools is to take away a template for measuring the results of one's efforts. The list could go on indefinitely. One may take virtually any legislation, administrative change, or Supreme Court decision of the 1960s and early 1970s intended to help poor people and ask, "How would this affect a poor young person's perception of his personal responsibility?" and the answer would be the same: Right behavior, he would learn, is not necessarily followed by rewards; wrong behavior is not necessarily followed by penalties. Outcomes are a lottery. When things go wrong, there are ready excuses; when things go well, it is luck.

To pursue this line of inquiry, it is not necessary to toss out alternative explanations. The *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s and a variety of other forces having nothing to do with social policy were surely at work. But these other forces have ebbed for most classes in our society or have been displaced by countervailing trends, while the rules set up for poor people in those years still operate largely unchanged. In many respects, social policy toward the poor is the last redoubt of the elite wisdom of the 1960s.

Neither is it necessary to treat the kinds of hypotheses raised here as ones to be abruptly tested and accepted or discarded. They will not statistically test the validity of antipoverty programs. They deal with the complicated side of the welfare problem: human behavior. These hypotheses, rather, are more useful for the perspectives they provide. When ways to shrink the under-class are found, they will grow from a strategic understanding of how social policy shapes behavior. To get leverage, analysts of social policy badly need a place to stand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Are teachers underpaid?

MYRON LIEBERMAN

IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, educational reform has been a growth industry in the United States. Government commissions, political and educational leaders, foundations, business organizations, prestigious academics, the mass media—all have bought into it. An impressive array of governors and legislative leaders in both major parties have become activists in the educational reform movement; for example, the National Governors' Association plans to publish the recommendations of a task force on which seven governors chaired subcommittees dealing with major educational problems. In addition to dozens of national reform reports, the Education Commission of the States reports the existence of almost three hundred state-level task forces on various aspects of educational reform. In terms of visibility, at least, educational reform continues to be an important topic of public and political discussion.[1]

[1] The references to reform in this article are not intended to apply to the recently released, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century, the Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy.* This report was not available in time to be considered in detail here. It does, however, support several conclusions and recommendations made in this article, such as: the impracticality of a huge salary increase for all teachers, the disincentives in current systems of teacher compensation; and the establishment of national, nongovernmental boards as the most feasible way to implement merit pay. Unfortunately, *A Nation Prepared* also includes several indefensible proposals, such as delegating control of public schools to teachers—which the report concedes would be tantamount to delegating it to teacher unions. Although the report may promote awareness of critical governance and salary issues, its proposed resolution of several of them would be worse than the status quo.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In considering the prospects for achieving reform, it should be noted that many proposed reforms would adversely affect terms and conditions of teacher employment. A longer school day and school year are obvious examples, but many others could be cited. Naturally, teachers do not regard such proposals as "reforms." In their eyes, such proposals are merely a means to exploit teachers. Justified or not, this attitude cannot be ignored in view of the fact that public school teaching is one of our most highly unionized occupations. In 1984, over 60 percent of all public school teachers were members of a teacher union, and 72.5 percent were represented by one. The teacher unions are in business to achieve more, not less, favorable terms and conditions of employment for teachers. In other occupations, unions have accepted adverse changes ("givebacks," in union terminology) only in the face of highly visible threats to the job security of their members. The concessions made by the United Auto Workers to enable U.S. automobile manufacturers to compete with Japanese companies illustrate this point. In education, however, an enormous increase in the number of private schools is the only potential threat to the livelihood of public school teachers. Although such an increase may take place, thus far it is not occurring, nor is it likely to do so in the near future.

On the other hand, the reform reports unanimously support a substantial increase in teacher salaries. Teachers understandably view such proposals as "real" or "genuine" reforms, not "fads" or "quick fixes." Therefore, let us consider the reform most strongly supported by teachers. After all, if their opposition is a major roadblock to reform, perhaps reforms they enthusiastically support have a better chance to succeed.

How teachers are paid . . .

First, it is essential to see how and how much teachers are paid. Unquestionably, the vast majority of teachers are paid solely according to their training and years of experience. Salary schedules differ primarily in the number of years that receive salary credit and in the kind and amount of higher education credits required for salary increases. There is also some variation in the extra-duty schedule, that is, in the stipends paid for coaching, class advising, band leading, and other extracurricular activities, and in whether additional amounts are paid for advanced degrees as distinguished from mere accumulation of credit.

Most teacher salary schedules do not provide salary differentials according to the subject or grade level. It is not unusual, however,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to pay school psychologists, counselors, special education teachers, and a few other categories a stipend above the schedule for most teachers. Even in these cases, however, the additional stipend often reflects either a longer school year or additional training or both.

It was not always this way. In the early 1900s common practice was to pay secondary more than elementary school teachers. The differentials were both cause and result of the fact that elementary school teachers were overwhelmingly female, whereas high school teachers were more evenly divided between the sexes. The movement toward a single schedule covering Grades K-12 resulted from the fact that there are twice as many elementary as secondary school teachers. It became impossible to achieve a leadership position in teacher organizations without supporting a single schedule covering all grades.

Actually, a different pattern might have materialized in the early 1960s. Today it is widely agreed that the 1961 collective bargaining election among New York City's teachers was the single most important stimulus to teacher bargaining and teacher unions in the 1960s. One of the critical issues in this election was whether all teachers should be in the same bargaining unit. For tactical reasons, the National Education Association (NEA) supported the idea that elementary, junior high, and senior high school teachers should separately choose unions to represent their grade levels. If the NEA position had prevailed, it is virtually certain that many school districts would have reverted to the practice of paying secondary more than elementary school teachers. The NEA position did not prevail, however, and today the issue is moot.

Needless to say, the elimination of salary differentials for higher grade levels could not be publicly ascribed to the fact that elementary outnumbered secondary school teachers in teacher unions by a two-to-one margin. Instead, it was rationalized by the alleged importance of the first few years of schooling and by the fact that elementary school teachers usually worked as many days as secondary ones. Neither reason is very impressive. We do not pay high school mathematics teachers as much as university professors of the subject, even though we could make the same argument about the importance of the early years. The fact is that salaries are influenced less by the importance of the work than by the availability of the skills needed. In general, we pay enough to get the job done adequately, no more. Nor is the fact that elementary teachers work as many school days particularly important. So do school custodians and secretaries, but no one contends they should be paid as much as teachers for this reason.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

. . . and how much . . .

How much are teachers paid? Perhaps the most accurate as well as the most surprising answer is that nobody knows. There is a wealth of data on the subject, but it is incomplete on certain critical points. Significantly, the NEA, the largest of our two national teacher unions, is our primary source of data on teacher salaries; even federal agencies rely upon the NEA for information on teacher salaries and salary trends. As we shall see, the missing data would show significantly higher levels of compensation than those accepted by the reformers or the public generally. The relevant data are missing, it seems, precisely because they would weaken union claims that teachers are underpaid.

Another important question is this: Who is included in determining average salaries? In conducting its salary surveys, the NEA uses two categories: "classroom teachers" and "instructional staff." The latter includes supervisors of instruction, librarians, guidance counselors, psychologists, and principals, and its average wage is significantly higher than the average for classroom teachers. For example, the NEA estimated that in 1984-85 the average was $23,546 for classroom teachers and $24,569 for instructional staff.

A Nation At Risk, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, is widely regarded as the leading reform manifesto. Be that as it may, the report illustrates the inaccurate, not to say haphazard, treatment of teacher salaries. The report states: "The average salary after twelve years of teaching is only $17,000 per year, and many teachers are required to supplement their income with part-time and summer employment." Although not stated explicitly, the $17,000 figure was presumably meant to apply to the 1981-82 school year. Actually, the NEA estimated the average teacher salary in 1981-82 to be $19,276, that is, 13.4 percent higher than the commission figure.

Like most discussions of teacher salaries, *A Nation At Risk* says nothing about the fringe benefits paid to teachers. This does not mean their shorter workyear and workday, which will be discussed later. Instead, it refers to payments made for the following: teacher retirement; health and welfare benefits; leave benefits; extra duty pay (for example, coaching); unemployment insurance; and workers' compensation.

As in the private sector, health and welfare benefits, primarily medical and hospital insurance, have become major components of teacher compensation. Additionally, the data on teacher salaries do not ordinarily include the amounts paid by school boards and state governments for teacher retirement. Nevertheless, these important

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elements of total compensation were ignored by the national commission, as they are generally in discussions of teacher salaries. Obviously, these omissions result in significant understatements of teacher compensation.

Like public employee pension systems generally, teacher retirement systems tend to be much more generous than the retirement benefits available to most private sector employees. Nationally, contributions for teacher fringe benefits averaged about 22 percent of salary in 1983-84; the comparable figure for all workers outside of teaching is 19 percent. It appears also that in some states (California, Michigan, New York) school district contributions for fringe benefits are 35 percent of salary.[2] Note also that teacher fringe benefits are likely to increase even more rapidly in the near future. Some states emphasized higher pension benefits instead of direct salary increases in the 1970s; in these states, substantially greater school district/state contributions will be required as teacher retirements increase.

The deficiencies cited above characterize teacher salary discussions at the local level. Teachers frequently opt for increases in fringe benefits instead of increases in salaries. This often occurs because the fringe benefits are not taxable to the teachers; the additional income to teachers *would* be taxed if the funds for health and welfare benefits were added to teacher salaries. Typically, teachers ignore the fringe benefits in their efforts to persuade the public that they should be paid more. In fact, teachers invariably allege that teacher salaries have lagged behind the cost of living—while simultaneously ignoring the fact that the school board is paying for medical and dental costs, which have escalated more than any other component of the cost of living. Such tactics would be futile except for media incompetence in reporting upon public sector labor disputes.

As this is written, the Reagan administration has introduced legislation that would eliminate the tax-sheltered status of health insurance benefits. Such proposed legislation has aroused intense union opposition, and appears unlikely to be enacted. Nevertheless, in addition to providing a much-needed brake on the costs of health care, the change would clearly be consistent with economic realities.

. . . for how long

In discussing teacher salaries, the amount of time teachers work is usually ignored. It is understandable why teachers should ignore

[2] Sheppard Ranbom, "State Efforts to Control Pension Costs Spark Controversy," *Education Week*, March 7, 1984, pp. 1, 19.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this issue, but not why others should. The number of workdays is seldom at issue; we can use 180 days as a reasonably accurate national average. Serious controversy exists, however, with respect to the length of the teacher workday. Most teachers work a defined schoolday, usually 6 to 7.5 hours, including lunch and preparation periods. The lunch period is usually at least thirty minutes but it is not always duty free, even when this is mandated by state law. On the other hand, preparation periods are often not used for preparation and ocasionally they are used for personal tasks, or simply for rest during the day.

The major issue is how much time teachers devote to their work outside the regular school day. A 1983 NEA report asserted categorically that "teachers average 46 hours of work a week." This conclusion was based upon teachers' subjective judgments and recollections of how much time they devoted to school tasks. Given the self-serving nature of most NEA studies, and the procedures used, a healthy skepticism seems warranted. No doubt some teachers average 46 hours a week, despite union efforts to discourage voluntary work because it weakens union efforts to have it compensated. Still, in negotiating over one hundred contracts with teacher unions in six states from Rhode Island to California, I have yet to encounter one which showed any interest in a 40-hour workweek that would encompass all of their duties, including those allegedly performed outside the regular school day. Regardless, it would be naive to accept the NEA's conclusion that most teachers average 46 hours of work per week without additional corroboration.

To summarize, both the rate and the amount of teacher compensation are typically understated while their hours of work are overstated. In addition, teachers typically enjoy certain benefits, such as tenure, which have financial value even if they are not regarded as part of the compensation package. Let us ignore these considerations, however, and turn to the contention that it is imperative to raise the relative economic status of teachers.

The case for a raise

Why precisely is it imperative, or even desirable? The reasons most often cited are that (1) teaching is not as good as it should be because teachers are recruited largely from the lower ranks of high school and college graduates, and (2) it is impossible to attract teachers to certain fields because the salaries in those fields are too low. As *A Nation At Risk* observed, "Too many teachers are being drawn from the bottom quarter of graduating high school and college stu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dents." The report went on to point out: "The shortage of teachers in mathematics and science is particularly severe. A 1981 survey of forty-five states revealed shortages of mathematics teachers in forty-three states, critical shortages of earth science teachers in thirty-three states, and of physics teachers everywhere." To remedy these problems, *A Nation At Risk* recommended that:

> Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated.

The commission did not provide any specifics on how large an increase would be required to achieve these objectives. In this respect at least, its recommendations contrast markedly with those made by Ernest L. Boyer, the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the author of the foundation-sponsored study of secondary school education. The 1983 Boyer study recommended that "the average salary for teachers should be increased by at least 25 percent beyond the rate of inflation over the next three years, with immediate entry-level increases."

Like the other reformers who have considered the matter, Boyer emphasized the fact that teaching is not economically competitive with other professions. He also contends that low salaries force teachers to moonlight extensively, thus reducing the time that should be devoted to their teaching positions or to professional improvement. Despite differences in language and emphasis, these are the major arguments for increasing teacher salaries.

These arguments are expressed as if their validity were self-evident. But none of the arguments demonstrates a causal relationship between the decline in scholastic aptitude among beginning teachers and the actual decline in student achievement. The causal relationship is assumed without question. Nevertheless, if one assumes that the decline in student achievement has multiple causes, then we should have at least a rough idea of how it is affected by the talent level of teachers. Yet no one seems to have any idea of either how much additional teacher talent would be attracted by increases in teacher compensation, or how much students would learn if teachers were paid more.

The more one considers the matter, the less impressive the argument for a significant general increase in the level of teacher compensation looks. Consider the National Commission's recommendation that teaching salaries be "professionally competitive." The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducted a survey in 1983 to determine the costs of the commission's recommendations. It did so by means of a survey of twenty-eight school districts: urban, rural, and suburban; large and small; and from every region in the country. Using a survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics at the U.S. Department of Labor, the AASA estimated that the *lowest* average entry level salary for professionals with a bachelors degree was $18,720 per year. It then asked the survey school districts the following question: "What would be the cost to raise starting teachers' salaries to $18,720 per year?"

The responses highlight the unrealistic nature of the National Commission's recommendation. The average current starting salary in these twenty-eight districts was $13,853. The cost of raising beginning salaries to $18,720, just in these 28 districts, was $273,907,291! Such a raise would have increased average salaries in the twenty-eight districts from 14.2 to 58.5 percent and would have increased the total budgets of all twenty-eight districts by 12.9 percent.

Even so, the AASA study grossly *understated* the cost of implementing the recommendation. In the first place, it was based upon increasing only the beginning teacher salary and any others below $18,720. A district could hardly do this without raising at least some other salaries; it would be absurd to assume that administrators, teachers already earning over $18,720, and nonteacher employees would accept a situation in which beginning teachers received raises of 16.5 to 58.3 percent and they received nothing. Furthermore, if school districts did indeed raise their beginning salaries to $18,720, many firms that pay this salary to beginning professionals would increase it to meet the competition from the schools. Just how high the bidding would go is anybody's guess, but $18,720 would merely have been the start of the auction, not the end of it.

The point here, however, is not the cost of the salary recommendations in *A Nation At Risk*. It is the absence of any concrete idea of what, where, when, and how educational benefits would accrue from increasing teacher salaries. Instead, there are only general appeals to raise teacher salaries, without the slightest indication of what levels of improvement would result. Long before any such calculations are made, however, the futilitarian nature of the reform proposals should be clear to everyone. Take, for example, Boyer's recommendation that teacher salaries be increased by 25 percent above the rate of inflation over the next three years. The estimated average salary of 2,150,000 public school teachers in 1982-83 was $20,700, not including any fringe benefits. Boyer's recommendation would have cost about $9 billion, not including increases in man-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dated costs based upon teacher salaries or increases for other employees certain to take militant action to get their share. Little wonder that Boyer is praised as an educational statesman in teacher-paid advertisements.

Private schools and merit pay

One additional challenge to the conventional wisdom should be noted. There is widespread belief and considerable evidence that private schools educate at least as well as public schools. Unquestionably, however, teachers in private schools are paid less, and receive less in fringe benefits, than teachers in public schools. Of course, the differences vary from area to area and from school to school, but most private school teachers probably earn only two-thirds to three-quarters as much as public school teachers.

How can this be? That is, how can it be argued that higher salaries for public school teachers are essential, while teachers in private schools are paid considerably less but presumably perform as well or better? Clearly, the lower average salaries in private schools cannot be explained by the presence of a small number of teachers who are members of religious orders; the differentials apply to lay teachers, who comprise the vast majority anyway. It is often asserted that private school teachers have more autonomy, more freedom from bureaucratic demands, and more input into professional decisions, such as the textbook selection. These claims, however, have not been substantiated on a systematic basis.

Understandably, some teachers prefer to teach at a lower salary if the school has higher morale and fewer unruly pupils and security problems. Nevertheless, superior nonsalary conditions of employment do not always prevail in private schools. For instance, class size, which is an important condition of employment, is usually larger in private than in public schools. Furthermore, to the extent that superior conditions of employment do in fact compensate for the lower levels of salary in private schools, they would also weaken the argument that higher teacher salaries are essential.

In any event, proposals to raise the economic status of teachers generally are wishful thinking; so much is even being conceded privately by some teacher union leaders. They and others are showing more interest in proposals which call for substantial salary increases for one or more subgroups of teachers. These subgroups would be differentiated from other teachers by their function, their subject matter specialization, and/or their superior teaching performance.

Although all three kinds of salary proposals are often labeled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"merit pay," there are important differences among them; for example, in incentives, costs, ease of administration, and consequences for collective bargaining. Differentials based upon subject matter require minimal administrative judgment, are relatively easy to administer, and would probably have more immediate effects than merit pay. A college senior majoring in mathematics is more likely to become a teacher because of a subject matter differential than a merit pay one. The student would realize that the subject matter differential would be available immediately, whereas the merit pay differential would be uncertain, involve a great deal of judgment, require a multiyear evaluation period, and would likely be resented by more experienced teachers. These comments are not intended to bless one category or criticize another, but rather to underscore the need to examine each proposal on its own merits.

Because these three approaches are often confused, let us begin by illustrating the differences.

1. A is a "Master Teacher" who helps to train new teachers. B is an excellent teacher who doesn't want to be bothered by training duties and isn't concerned about the salary differential for doing so. If the district pays A more than B because of A's role in training teachers, we have a salary differential based upon different functions. Such proposals are often referred to as "differentiated staffing."

2. C is a mathematics teacher; D is a history teacher. Both are excellent teachers. Both do everything expected of teachers, in and out of the classroom. Nevertheless, because of the tremendous shortage of mathematics teachers, C is paid five thousand dollars annually more than D. In this case, we have a salary differential based upon subject matter specialization.

3. E is an outstanding mathematics teacher; F is an average mathematics teacher. They are the same age, have the same training and experience, and perform the same tasks throughout the day. Nevertheless, the district pays E more than F because it wishes to pay outstanding teachers more than average ones. In this case, the salary differential is based upon differences in the quality of performance.

I shall refer only to the third group of salary proposals as "merit pay"; proposals to pay teachers more based upon functional differentiation or subject matter specialization are not "merit pay" as the phrase is used here.

Educational economics

Let us first consider subject matter differentials. The reformers have repeatedly noted the severe teacher shortages in certain fields,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such as mathematics and science. The cause of the shortages is simple enough. People who have the abilities and aptitudes to be competent teachers of these subjects can earn substantially more in private-sector positions. According to the folklore of education, concern for young people is the primary and common characteristic of teachers. In the real world, however, a mathematics teacher has more in common with other people having mathematical skills and aptitudes than with other teachers. There is a strong nonschool demand for mathematics teachers, or for students who could be mathematics teachers. There is no such strong nonschool demand for persons who would make good history teachers. This is why it is foolish to pay both the same salary.

Suppose a university decided that professors of surgery and professors of English literature were really members of the same profession because they both enjoyed teaching, and should therefore be paid the same. The upshot would be that the university either would overpay professors of English literature, perhaps by as much as seventy-five thousand dollars a year, or it would be unable to hire professors of surgery; even surgeons not qualified to teach surgery would not teach for the salaries paid to professors of English literature.

As absurd as this self-imposed dilemma would be, it is precisely the dilemma facing school districts which pay mathematics teachers the same as history teachers. The districts end up without mathematics teachers, just as a university would end up without surgery professors if it followed such a shortsighted policy.

The teacher unions try to avoid wage differentials; such differentials lead to internal strife, something the unions don't want. Furthermore, the lower the differential, the less likely it will achieve its purpose; the higher the differential, the less support for it there will be among teachers. The differential is offered because the number of teachers in the subject is very limited. On the other hand, unions seldom negotiate hard for large gains for a few constituents. The union negotiator responds to what most members want—and what they want is more money for themselves, not concessions that indicate their services are not as valuable as anyone else's.

Although single salary schedules do not necessarily eliminate intra-union conflict over salaries, they do tend to minimize it—although that is seldom given as the reason why unions negotiate them. The reasons usually given are that all teachers love children, all are members of the same profession, and all have the same amount of training. More importantly, the teacher unions view the shortages in specific fields as leverage to achieve salary increases for all teach-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers. Additionally, salary differentials for fields experiencing severe shortages could be a disastrous precedent. Once it is conceded that market factors are a legitimate concern in salaries for mathematics teachers, why stop there? Why not go on to say that if the school district has several competent applicants for teaching history, it should *lower* the salary for history teachers as well as increase the salary offered for mathematics teachers? Paradoxically, overpayment of some teachers is as serious a problem as underpayment of others; in fact, reducing the overpayments may be essential to resolving the problems of underpayment. School boards lament their inability to compete for people who would be competent mathematics or science teachers. On the other hand, if boards would stop overpaying teachers in fields which could be competently staffed at lower salaries, they could pay the higher salaries needed to recruit teachers in fields of shortage.

Let us turn next to salary differentials based upon the performance of different functions. Such differentials have always characterized public education. Superintendents are paid more than principals because of the differences in function. Teachers are paid more than teacher's aides for the same reason.

In the past few years, proposals to pay some teachers higher salaries for carrying out functions not shared by other teachers have been the subject of widespread discussion and some legislation. Several governors and legislative leaders have indicated their willingness to increase the salaries of some but not all teachers. Typically, state-mandated merit rating is neither politically nor administratively feasible. Consequently, political leaders have relied more and more upon functional differentiation as a basis for additional compensation.

The "team teaching" fiasco

Past experience with differentiated staffing among teachers demonstrates the problems that any such approach must overcome to be effective. "Team teaching," one of the most celebrated flops promoted by the Ford Foundation in the 1950s, was essentially an effort to pay teachers more by differentiating their roles. The advocates of team teaching were impressed by functional differentiation in medicine. Medical occupations include physicians, nurses, laboratory technicians, nutritionists, physical therapists, and so on. Physicians perform the most highly specialized functions, demanding the most training. The other occupations are subordinate to the physicians and are paid less. Physicians do not spend their time

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

doing the work of subordinate groups. To do so would escalate the costs of the services involved; it would also reduce the time physicians could use their professional skills (and their income). The more professionals perform work that can be performed by less qualified workers, the less the professionals can concentrate on the work only they are qualified to do.

In principle, the concept makes good sense. If applied to education, how should various functions be allocated among the educational occupations? Initially, team teaching started out with teachers and teacher's aides. In elementary grades, aides carried out such nonprofessional tasks as meeting buses, helping children take off or put on overcoats, and collecting or passing out assignments. In the secondary schools, however, the concept of differentiated staffing was tied to large group instruction. It is just as easy to lecture to 250 students as 25. Instead of ten classes, each with 25 students, why not have one teacher lecture to 250? This teacher could be the most qualified to teach the particular assignment; furthermore, the teacher would have more time to prepare the lecture, because of the overall savings in time involved. Instead of requiring ten teachers to prepare the same lesson, one teacher could do so. The other teachers could use the time saved to work with individual students or in small group instruction. Later, the teachers could reverse their roles on some other topic.[3] Thus "teams" could be of varying size and composition.

For a few years, efforts to introduce team teaching emerged all over the country. Most "lighthouse" districts—that is, affluent suburban districts that confused wealth with leadership—jumped on the team teaching bandwagon. Like most educational reforms, team teaching started with enormous fanfare; not long afterwards, however, it was buried in a shallow unmarked grave, somewhere in Scarsdale or Beverly Hills.

In retrospect, the reasons for its demise are easily understood. Inasmuch as the medical profession was the model, let us see how physicians would have acted if they had followed the education version: Two or more surgeons would have met after graduation from medical school. One would have said, "You can be the doctor, I'll be the nurse this week. Next week, you'll be the nurse and I'll be the doctor." That is, instead of having clearly defined occupational roles, which relate back to training, role differentiation in team teaching was based on the ad hoc judgments of teachers about what they would like to do.

In the medical profession, equipment and facilities are based upon the functions performed by the various medical specialties.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nurses, therapists, nutritionists, X-ray technicians and so on have their specialized equipment and facilities and work stations. These go with the specialization; they are not established subjectively by individuals who divide up the work one way this week and a different way next week.

In medicine, as in other fields in which occupational roles are well defined, personality plays little or no role in who does what. The doctor may be a shy retiring fellow, but he still is in charge, medically speaking. In education, however, things took a different turn. Frequently, teacher's aides were assigned to classrooms with no clearly defined tasks; they were there to help the teacher. The latter was supposed to figure out what to do with the aides after they arrived. In this loose occupational structure, personality factors soon began to play a dominant role; aggressive aides or paraprofessionals, often mothers of pupils, began to dominate the teachers.

The foregoing are only some of the problems that frustrated differential staffing in the past. Current schemes to pay higher salaries based upon functional specialization do not address these problems. If anything, their rationale and implementation appear to be even more capricious than those of the earlier efforts.

"Master teachers" and merit pay

Most current efforts are "master teacher" plans. Districts are allowed to designate a certain proportion of teachers as "master teachers." The state then puts up a certain amount of money each year for these; in this way, districts are able to pay more to their outstanding teachers.

These plans, actual and proposed, vary considerably, but the following requirements appear frequently.

1. Master teachers will be released from teaching for part of the day to help new teachers, work on curriculum, and/or such other duties as may be negotiated or agreed upon. In other words, to avoid having state-mandated "merit pay," the legislation provides for some functional differentiation between master teachers and others. The most common fiction is that the master teacher will work with new teachers or teachers who are having difficulties.

2. The master teachers must teach a specified proportion of a full teaching load (usually 50 to 80 percent).

3. Master teachers cannot supervise or evaluate other teachers. The real but unstated reason for this is that teachers who supervise or evaluate other teachers are usually excluded from teacher bargaining units by the state bargaining laws. Consequently, if master teachers supervised or evaluated other teachers, the unions would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frequently lose them as dues-paying members. (Of course, this reason is not articulated publicly.)

In practice, master teacher plans are usually counterproductive. Clearly, the additional stipend is irrelevant to keeping talented teachers in the profession. The teachers receiving it are usually at the top of the salary schedule, and have no plans to stop teaching and retire or transfer to a nonteaching job. Frequently, their spouses have settled occupations in the area. As a matter of fact, many master teachers would often continue to teach in the district even if their salaries were reduced instead of increased.

Although enacted to keep good teachers in the classroom, the master teacher programs have precisely the opposite effect. To maintain the fiction of functional specialization, the master teachers are assigned to nonteaching tasks outside of the classroom. Neither the school district nor the teachers really care what these tasks are, since they are only a fig leaf to avoid the implication that the master teachers are receiving merit pay. In practice, master teacher legislation typically encourages good teachers to get out of the classroom to perform duties that the districts are unwilling to pay for themselves.

This brings us to merit pay. As I have defined it, "merit pay" exists if and only if teacher A is paid more than teacher B *for performing the same kind of work*, that is, teaching the same grade or subject. Clearly, paying teachers on the basis of merit is not a common practice in the U.S.; in 1978, only 115 of 11,502 districts enrolling three hundred or more pupils had merit pay, even as defined much more inclusively than it is here.[3]

Why, despite widespread public support for merit pay, does such a miniscule number of school districts provide it? One reason which is widely overlooked is that most school administrators do not want the task of identifying the teachers who are to receive merit pay. Such action inevitably generates intense scrutiny of administrative judgments. Inasmuch as most teachers do not receive merit pay, there will be many dissatisfied teachers ready to criticize every award; the typical administrator is likely to feel that he can do without this headache.

On the other hand, since the concept has widespread public support, administrators need some other reason to explain its absence. Teacher unions meet this need. They are indeed opposed to merit pay, and hence their opposition provides an excuse which explains its absence while letting administrators off the hook.

[3] *Merit Pay for Teachers*, Arlington: Educational Research Service, 1979.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In fact, merit pay is about as rare where unions are weak and could not block it as where they are strong and able to so. In most districts, union opposition to merit pay is simply an additional reason why it will not materialize. As with administrators, however, the real reasons unions are opposed to merit pay are not the reasons given for public consumption. The latter emphasize the "subjectivity" of merit pay and the alleged likelihood that it will be used to reward lackeys of the school administration. The reality is that unions have more to fear from competent than from inept administration of merit pay. No matter how competent the administration, many teachers will feel they were erroneously passed over for merit pay. If they approach the union for help, the union is in a no-win situation. It can hardly get involved in controversies over whether union members A, B, and C are more deserving of merit pay than union member X; such controversies would divide and weaken the union. Nor can it say to the A's, B's, and C's (who will always outnumber the X's) that "you don't deserve merit pay as much as X." The only way the unions can avoid this dilemma is to avoid merit pay, preferably by emphasizing objections that ignore union dynamics.

For these and other reasons, merit pay plans in which the determinations of merit are made by local school administrators are unlikely to be adopted widely in public education. On the other hand, merit pay plans similar in concept to the medical specialty boards may materialize in the next two-to-five years. Although NEA/AFT willingness to consider such plans is a result of the reform movement, this particular approach was first proposed in 1959. Under educational specialty boards, determinations of merit would be made by national nongovernmental boards, controlled by scholars in various subjects as well as experts in pedagogy. Such boards could obviate teacher union objections to merit pay; this is not their only advantage over conventional merit pay, but it may be the most important one politically. Paradoxically, AFT president Albert Shanker is providing the national leadership on educational specialty boards; if implementation does not founder on NEA/AFT rivalry, such boards are likely to be operative by 1990. Even so, implementation of such boards would probably affect only a small number of teachers for several years. For this reason, such boards, whatever their merits, may not have any impact upon teacher salaries or teacher recruitment until the 1990s.

What lies ahead

Where does this leave us? In the short run (five years, at least) teacher salaries will be affected more by changes outside than within

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the field of education. Some of these changes will be conducive to an increase in the relative economic position of teachers. For example, we are about to enter an era of acute teacher shortages. One reason is that the number of teachers needed must be recruited from a smaller population base than would normally be required to provide the needed teachers. In addition, opportunities outside of education for women have increased considerably in recent years. As a result, many talented women who formerly would have entered teaching are going into other occupations, thereby exacerbating the shortages due to demographic factors.

At the same time, other demographic data suggest teachers will have a difficult time maintaining their present economic status. In 1983, the median age of our population was 30.9 and there were twice as many persons under eighteen as there were over sixty-five. Sometime in the twenty-first century, the median age will be over forty and there will be more persons over sixty-five than under eighteen. Significantly, elderly recipients of federal assistance receive about ten times as much per recipient as child beneficiaries of such assistance. Furthermore, public opinion polls show that the elderly are much less willing to be taxed for education than parents and younger citizens; a 1983 Gallup poll showed that whereas citizens under fifty were evenly divided on whether they would support higher taxes for education, those over fifty were opposed by a 62 to 28 percent margin. In short, the graying of the population will not only increase the demand for noneducational services but will help to create a social and political context which is less supportive of higher teacher salaries.

It is difficult to say whether the external factors favorable to higher salaries will be more influential than the factors keeping salaries down. The important conclusion is not that salaries will go up or down, but that whatever they do, the structure and relative economic status of teacher salaries are not likely to change significantly in the near future. Whether these things will change for at least a decade is doubtful; the most that we can reasonably expect are some showcase examples of high salaries which are based upon factors that can be institutionalized on a broad scale. Educational specialty boards aside, however, no such examples are in prospect. If they materialize at all, they are much more likely to emerge from one or more forms of private enterprise involvement in public education. Unfortunately this possibility, like most which might improve education in the real world, has been all but ignored by the reform movement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Berkeley youth wars

GAIL L. ZELLMAN & STEVEN L. SCHLOSSMAN

IN THE EARLY twentieth century, the university town of Berkeley, California, forged a nationally noted and admired consensus on how it should educate, discipline, and serve its youth. This consensus expressed the most enlightened views and practices of the times, with social science providing a base for imaginative social and educational planning. City officials confidently believed in a "science of human conduct" that justified early and active intervention into the lives of children showing any behavior irregularity—any sign, in the jargon of the day, of "maladjustment." The Berkeley Coordinating Council for Child Welfare, composed of representatives from the schools, police, and social agencies, watched over childhood socialization, alert to poor parental performance, ready to intervene to diminish the severity of early behavior problems, and determined to impose communal norms on children and parents alike. Until the end of World War II, it remained the hub around which youth policy in Berkeley revolved and a centerpiece of the residents' glowing self-image as the most progressive small city in the nation.

By the postwar era, however, Berkeley had changed radically —and its handling of "maladjusted" youth became, as it often has been, a model for some and an example to be avoided for others.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The new model was freedom, pluralism, and an acceptance of all the subcultures that, in the late 1960s, suddenly burst with loud claims upon the local scene. While Berkeley in the early 1980s found itself in a period of tentative withdrawal from the furthest extremes of this individualism, the ideological and nostalgic commitment to the values of the 1960s remained pervasive and vital. Urgent problems demanded attention, yet a desire for consensus blocked any effective action. The resulting policy stalemate tells us a good deal about the difficult experiences so many American communities have undergone with their youth in the last two decades.

World War II and the integration struggle

In 1940, Berkeley's population of eighty thousand had been constant for a decade. The community remained nearly entirely white, with the overwhelming majority native-born; perhaps 7 percent of the residents were black, Hispanic, or Asian. While the Depression forced cutbacks in services, the city's unique social and economic structure spared residents the hardships common in other communities. Berkeley had survived the nation's economic turmoil comfortably, its population safely stable and homogeneous, its vaunted "goodness of living" the envy of civic leaders everywhere.

World War II disrupted Berkeley's civic life as the Depression had not and undermined the homogeneous population base upon which the consensus about social and educational planning for youth had rested. The war brought thousands of men and women to the Bay area to work in temporary industries such as shipbuilding, a disproportionate number of whom were rural blacks from the South. While the federal government often recruited them, it did nothing to aid the newcomers or the communities they had settled in following the war's end. The upshot in Berkeley was, by 1950, a population increase of 40 percent, an increase in the minority population of 150 percent (to over 15 percent of the total population), and a severe job and housing shortage.

The initial response of civic leaders was resentment against the newcomers for disrupting their model community, and a determination to do nothing to assist them in the hope they would soon leave. In 1950, for example, the Berkeley City Council rejected a proposal from the planning commission to conduct a study clarifying housing needs because it feared that the results might provoke a campaign for public housing. Their "good community" lay in the past, not the future; the progressive civic leaders of the prewar era now became apostles of nostalgia and inaction. They refused to raise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

taxes or respond to the needs of growing numbers of Berkeley's "new immigrants" and their children.

The first indications of significant challenge to the prevailing conservative mood began to emerge in the mid-1950s, fueled largely by the growth of the Berkeley campus as an intellectual and political center, by the excitement stimulated by Adlai Stevenson's abortive presidental campaigns, and by the continuing rapid growth and early political organization of the city's black population, primarily through the NAACP. Liberal whites and blacks argued that social discrimination and segregation underlay the city's most pressing problems, and, as elsewhere at the time, the schools became the focal point of demands to end a *de facto* segregation.

By 1961, liberal integrationists held majorities on both the school board and the city council and racial integration—especially in the schools—had become the major topic of political discussion in the community. Supporters saw it as a means not only to provide equal opportunity for all Berkeley youth, but to revitalize the city's long dormant "progressive" self-image. The city's new superintendent of schools, Neil Sullivan, in his book, *Now Is The Time*, argued for racial integration more boldly still: "Whether or not we can change adults," he observed, "we *can* change children. Our children will grow up in a community where justice is a way of life and, we hope, they will spread justice."

Berkeley had taken some steps to improve race relations in the schools, but black leaders remained dissatisfied with the lack of progress toward genuine integration. Under the sponsorship of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), they convinced the now-liberal school board to appoint a citizen's committee to analyze the extent of segregation and its effects on student motivation, academic achievement, and delinquency. The committee's report (issued late in 1963) confirmed the existence of widespread *de facto* segregation in the schools, documented enormous achievement differences between white and black schools, and recommended, among other things, substantial junior high school redistricting. After much acrimony and modification of the redistricting plan, the school board ordered desegregation to begin in the fall of 1964. "You've done things other towns hadn't the nerve to do," an Oakland educator told Berkeley's school superintendent.

In the spring of 1967 the school board committed itself to total desegregation of the elementary schools and invited all citizens and agencies to submit desegregation plans. Some fifty were received and analyzed; the one chosen was proposed by a teacher. It was the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most far-reaching desegregation plan ever adopted by any community with a population over one hundred thousand and an almost even distribution of minority (41 percent black) and Caucasian students. "The significant difference between the Berkeley plan and other plans for integration of elementary schools," explained Superintendent Sullivan, "is the two-way busing. Negro and white children are bused—Negro children ride up to mix with their white classmates in middle Berkeley and the hills in Grades K-3; white children come down to mix with Negro classmates for the fourth through sixth grades. Berkeley is the only city . . . that has thus equalized the burden of busing." The plan was implemented in the fall of 1968.

Although the new policy focused solely on the schools, its sponsors foresaw momentous effects: nothing less than the imparting of an ingrained sense of social justice and racial equality to each student. A key assumption underlay the effort, as it had Berkeley's progressive role in the 1920s: namely, that a few civic leaders could legitimately seek to articulate and enforce a single standard of appropriate behavior for *all* of the city's youth. They sought to show less enlightened communities how whites and blacks could work together to advance common egalitarian ideals for their children.

From integration to separatism

The community consensus that made school integration possible began to fall apart even before it was implemented. Outside forces and new cultural trends—notably the Vietnam War, Black Power, and the rise of the counterculture—coalesced early in 1968 and radically transformed the behavior of black and white students in the public schools. (These changes were fueled, of course, by parallel developments on the university campus.) Widespread drug use and sporadic attendance by junior high and especially high school students became commonplace. Black students in particular expressed dissatisfaction with what they claimed was the culturally irrelevant education Berkeley High School provided. Berkeley's civic leaders were thrown into a quandary. They soon concluded that the consensual strategies that had proposed uniform ideals for student behavior in the past were no longer adequate to meet new student needs and contain new cultural and political forces that were threatening to undermine school and parental authority. With some hesitation, they gradually abandoned the pursuit of a single standard of appropriate, progressive behavior for all Berkeley youth. In its stead, they substituted a policy of pluralism. The free and untrammeled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expression of individual and group preferences became, by the end of the decade, the hallmark of Berkeley's new, self-consciously progressive orientation toward dealing with youth and their problems.

The painstakingly developed integration plan, implemented with considerable community satisfaction in 1968, was undermined in the early 1970s by large-scale decentralization of the school system —a structural response to the demands of diverse student groups and their adult spokesmen. These groups claimed that a large, consensual, culturally heterogeneous institution was inherently insensitive to their unique ethnic perspectives, and therefore stifled their motivation and ability to learn. School leaders and many framers of the original desegregation plan were discouraged but accommodating. After all, the careful community consensus that had earlier been forged to bring about desegregation depended upon an institutionalized acquiescence and responsiveness by whites to black perceptions of their needs.

So the Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD) established and ran ten autonomous alternative schools in the years 1969 to 1973, including separate facilities for black (Black House), Hispanic (Casa de la Raza), and Asian students; three ethnic study programs were also introduced into the curriculum. The alternative schools, wanting to staff their classrooms with minority teachers, asserted their right to discriminate in hiring. Valuing relevance and community experience above book learning, they demanded that credentialing requirements be waived. Backed by substantial support for their efforts, they were often successful. Educational policymaking became increasingly decentralized and particularistic. A school that no longer dared to articulate common educational goals could hardly pretend to regulate other aspects of student behavior. As a result, supervision of attendance, dress, and antisocial behavior, particularly drug use, became tolerant if not lax. In essence, the schools renounced their long-held and, in Berkeley, historically compelling role as institutions that molded all the youth of the community.

Structural and moral pluralism affected other parts of the community as well. The city council placed severe restrictions on the ability of the police to detain or arrest the thousands of runaways who saw Berkeley as a mecca of unfettered liberation for young people. These constraints were reinforced by state legislation that decriminalized "status offenders" (that is, runaways, disobedient children, and promiscuous girls). In the name of pluralism, the guiding principle of youth advocacy in early 1970s Berkeley became "do your own thing."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But by the late 1970s the Vietnam War was over, runaways were going elsewhere, hallucinogenic drugs had lost much of their initial appeal, monies for social and educational experimentation had disappeared, and a general sense of ennui pervaded the political atmosphere. While the conservative tide was much less evident in Berkeley than in the rest of the nation, the pluralist ethos came under increasing challenge, particularly in education, where the alternative schools were floundering and failing.

Pluralism and its discontents: truancy and drugs

At least some elements in the community had had enough. Beginning in the late 1970s, a small group of white, middle-class women concluded, largely on the basis of personal experience, that the pluralist ethos had been pushed too far. Someone, they realized, had to articulate common ideals for all of Berkeley's youth.

In 1977 several "hill" mothers were shocked to learn that their children regularly were absent from school without the fact being reported by their teachers or school attendance officials. One parent, a volunteer in her daughter's school, was particularly incensed that no one had told her about her daughter's three-week absence, which she had learned about only accidently. She expressed her anger before the school board, complaining that the school district was not keeping its end of the bargain by failing to let parents know when their children were truant. The board members appointed a citizen's subcommittee to study truancy policies.

Truancy, they discovered, had not been considered a problem in the Berkeley cultural climate. Truant officers spent their time "rapping" with kids and few records were kept or rules enforced. The subcommittee held a different view: "We were pained that expensive education programs go for naught because pupils don't show up for class, and alarmed because truancy can lead in turn to delinquency, and distraught because ignorance and serious misbehavior can damage the child, the family, and society at large." While acknowledging that encouraging good school attendance was a joint responsibility of the schools, parents, and pupil, they stressed the key role of the schools. "Unfortunately, parents can't act if they are unaware their child is not in school, and a youngster senses indifference when no one notices his absence or his forged excuse."

While investigating absenteeism, the subcommittee found a lack of leadership by principals, considerable teacher apathy, a dearth of specially trained personnel to handle problem students, and scheduling "gaps" during the day that "provide a student with a perfect opportunity and temptation to become truant." The sub-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

committee strongly urged the school board in July 1978 to commit more resources to keeping track of and curtailing truancy, including regular communication with parents and easy access to school personnel. The clock was turning back.

And then there were drugs. The police, having been chastised frequently in the past for interfering with the liberated lifestyles of Berkeley youth, were now under orders not to issue citations for marijuana use, and the youth were well aware of this policy. Much of the school attendance problem, it became clear, was linked to students' systematic experimentation with drugs on school time and often on school grounds.

An embryonic group of concerned parents formed a new organization, Parents and Community Together (PACT). "The focus of our concern," the group stated, "is the social pressure young people are under to experiment with drugs at earlier and earlier ages." In an advertisement PACT listed its goals, two of which were most important for policy purposes:

- To expect police, school officials or other parents to contact us if our children are believed to be involved in drugs, alcohol, stealing, truancy, or any other behavior that may indicate trouble.
- To encourage the enforcement of laws against the sale of illegal substances and related paraphernalia to minors.

The school superintendent, several members of the city council and school board, the head of the police department's juvenile division, and the mayor publicly supported these objectives. By the following year, PACT members had helped persuade the schools to consider introducing drug and alcohol abuse education into the curriculum, had gotten the city council to appoint a committee to explore drug problems, and had played key roles in spurring the police to initiate numerous drug arrests and prosecutions on previously "safe" Telegraph Avenue.

It took PACT to legitimate a tough line on drug dealing in Berkeley—a fact that cost several PACT members friends who saw nothing wrong in supplying their children with drugs and who regarded PACT involvement as heresy. When parents in one residential neighborhood reported a neighbor making and selling pornographic material in his home, others agreed that this never would have happened in the past. Said one: "Parents would have looked the other way because you are supposed to be so God-damned tolerant in this town." PACT clearly struck a responsive chord among the city's white middle class who, by the end of the 1970s, had become increasingly dissatisfied with Berkeley's uncontained pluralistic ethos.

Another new group also emerged from the growing discontent.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Interagency Council (IAC) originated in 1978 under school district auspices and included representatives of the schools, police, and the city's public and private social service agencies. It worked to link the various social agencies of Berkeley, but in time it took a stronger role.

In 1982, in a major study (authorized by the city council) entitled *Alcohol, Youth, and Drugs*, the IAC lambasted the "anything goes" philosophy that underlay tolerance of relatively open drug use and dealing in Berkeley. The report documented, among other revelations, how preteens were being used as lookouts for heroin sales in the black neighborhoods of West Berkeley. It singled out the dangerous situation in Civic Center Park (also called Provo Park), located just a few blocks from municipal buildings and from Berkeley High School. There existed, the report alleged, an "implicit agreement between the city, schools, community, and police that Provo Park was a safe, neutral area in which a student could feel free to use and deal drugs. Permitting this hypocritical situation to continue undermines our community effort to promote the health and well-being of our young people. Provo Park is Berkeley's blind spot. As a beginning effort, we strongly recommend that city, school and law officials, through a joint effort, clean up the open drug scene at Provo immediately. Only then can we reestablish the heart of our city as a community center and a symbol of our caring for our young people."

The police responded to this call for action immediately by instituting continuous patrol of the park. In short order the entire atmosphere changed: Mothers and children replaced the loiterers, drug users, and dealers who had considered the park "home" for several years.

The challenge stalls

This success, however, was short-lived. It soon became clear that Berkeley could not develop a unified policy to maintain the standards that aroused conservative parents wanted to see implemented. The IAC went into precipitous decline; its political clout diminished; and dope dealing resumed in Provo Park as the police stopped daily surveillance. All social agencies were being hurt by retrenchment, but the main reason IAC failed was that on the two great issues affecting Berkeley's youth—drugs and truancy—there was no consensus. Blacks and whites saw things differently; and certainly the supporters of Berkeley's "do your own thing" ethos saw things differently from conservative parents. These divisions destroyed the possibility of an effective new consensus.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The division became most evident in the fight against drugs. PACT was the only Berkeley youth agency that was not severely hurt by financial retrenchment, largely because it was composed of volunteers. But its ability to exert communitywide leadership in Berkeley had been limited from the start. Its narrow concern with drugs and its overwhelmingly white, middle-class, female, "hill" constituency identified it as a rather exclusive group. PACT's potential for leadership in the broader community was diminished still further by its decision—inspired largely by the pleas for help from parents regarding their drug-abusing children—to turn inward and function primarily as a lay, treatment-oriented, parent-support group.

Loosely combining the spirit and philosophy of such well-established self-help groups as Tough Love and Alcoholics Anonymous, PACT leaders took a no-nonsense approach to both drug-abusing children and their parents. Drug-using children were referred to as chemically dependent and manipulative persons. Parents were urged to overcome their own tendencies toward denial that a drug problem existed and to be on the alert for incipient signs of drug dependency, such as persistent running away and the breaking of curfews. PACT attacked "the traditional approach of professionals who look at drug abuse as a symptom of other problems and aim through counseling to help the individual and the family make behavioral changes that will alleviate the pressure deemed responsible for drug abuse . . . PACT parents have found counseling while adolescents are masking their feelings with drugs to be ineffective." Treatment had to be family centered to overcome a child's chemical dependency: the family had "to learn where they have been enabling the self-destructive habits of the dependent person. Change is required for all."

While PACT was widely acknowledged as both innovative and effective, its approach was generally considered irrelevant by other segments of the community, particularly blacks. One high school staff member who worked regularly with difficult children, many of whom used drugs, observed that PACT's parent orientation assumed that a concerned adult existed to help a drug-using child overcome his dependency. In fact, many of the youth with drug problems were precisely those whose parents, burdened with multiple problems of their own, were unable to intervene or had long since stopped paying attention to their children's needs. Others emphasized the differences in perspective between PACT and the black community (particularly in the South and West Berkeley ghettos) regarding children's drug use.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In the 1980s, PACT's main concerns have been to help parents fight their own unwillingness to face reality regarding their children's drug involvement, to demonstrate that drug use is a calamitous form of chemical dependency, to teach parents who had been "democratic" in their child-rearing methods how to become authoritative disciplinarians at home, and to advise on the most effective forms of professional treatment. But Berkeley's blacks tend to see the situation quite differently. While they are deeply concerned about drugs, their priorities and perceptions reflect a different reality. Black parents express far less surprise when their children use drugs, and are less inclined to deny it or to hide their own drug use from their children. What most distinguishes the viewpoint of Berkeley's blacks, though, is the fact that their communities are the locus of a large amount of organized drug dealing in the East Bay. Dope dealers are everywhere. Residents are understandably afraid to inform on them, particularly if they are neighbors. In this setting, it is almost impossible to sustain a self-help group like PACT. Thus, a black self-help group formed in the early 1980s, the Berkeley Organizing Project (BOP), developed such a high profile and early impact that some BOP members feared for their safety. By 1984, BOP had ceased to exist.

Finally, unlike many white parents, who fear any kind of police involvement with their children, blacks who dare to speak out against drugs stress the need for a more aggressive police presence. Their main concerns focus less on kids' use of drugs *per se* than on the Fagan-like recruitment by dealers of young children as runners and look-outs.

In sum, however pervasive drug use may be among Berkeley youth, black and white alike, it has not proved to be an issue around which to rally communitywide sentiment very long or to develop common youth-advocacy strategies. In pluralist Berkeley, if blacks and whites perceive their problems as being different, the odds of significant public action being taken to address the matter are poor.

Radical individualism persists

The challenge to the "do your own thing" ethos ran into its most debilitating defeat, however, not on the issue of drugs but of truancy. The computerization of attendance reporting and the creation of a Student Attendance Review Board (SARB) were the most visible outcomes of the public outcry over unreported truancy in the late 1970s. The implementation and operation of computer-based

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attendance monitoring were, of course, far from perfect. Other school policies—such as the GAP program, which permitted students to skip several consecutive periods as part of their normal schedules, and the school's frequent failure to hire as many substitute teachers as were necessary to fill in for absent teachers—reduced the school's ability to keep students on campus and track their absences. As for the SARB, it had few viable options for changing a youth's behavior. It could refer a persistent truant to the district attorney, but rarely did because the district attorney had already indicated an unwillingness to prosecute simple truancy cases. It could refer truants to a magnet school specializing in the arts that might conceivably be better suited to their needs, or to the city's department of children's services, which generally would not intervene unless there were clear signs of child abuse. It could force children and parents to attend a formal hearing in order to admonish them on the possible dire consequences of truancy, but its power to effect a change in truant youths' behavior was very limited.

A new struggle emerged when the school administration proposed to the school board a program named "Operation Stay-in-School" to empower the police to pick up obviously truant youngsters loitering on the streets during school hours. The students were to be taken to a "reception center" (not a police facility) staffed by attendance counselors who would talk to the youth about the truancy in hopes of dissuading them from further unexcused absences. The counselor would contact students' parents and arrange for a return to school that day. The police supported the proposal, even though it would mean more work for them.

Operation Stay-in-School was greated with some predictable resistance by the school board. The name was changed to Project Stay-in-School (because the term "Operation" sounded too military), and police promised not to harass youngsters or keep records of the names of children picked up. The school board seemed ready to vote approval after having turned down the project three times. But then Berkeley's Police Review Commission (PRC), the nation's oldest civilian overseer of police department conduct (it was founded in 1973), swung into action. One member questioned the legality of "police stopping people on the street because they look like they should be in school." She further noted that the whole idea made her "mindful of South Africa."

PRC hearings on the project were held in October and November of 1983. Several speakers expressed fears that the project would intensify conflict between the police and minority youth. Yet it was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

generally white parents who were *most* opposed, fearing any police contacts with their children and believing the project to be alien to Berkeley's liberal traditions. Perhaps the most devastating testimony, though, came from a group of students whom the PRC asked to speak on the issue. The students said the project would divert the police from their real mission, "create tensions where there are already enough," "put students against the police," and rob students of their freedom. They unanimously opposed the plan.

The Police Review Commission voted six to one against Project Stay-in-School, urging instead that the board develop solutions that did not involve the police. The school board reacted by unanimously rejecting the project. In its place, the board established a twelve-member committee to study the district's attendance problems and make recommendations to the board on how truancy could be reduced. The establishment of a committee, a time-honored Berkeley approach to avoiding decisive and potentially divisive actions, led most observers to believe that Project Stay-in-School was dead.

The failure to enact Project Stay-in-School appeared to mark a more-or-less formal end to the challenge that had been launched in the late 1970s to the Berkeley ethos of unrestrained individualism. If neither drugs nor truancy any longer offered common ground for social action, and if diversity of opinion was itself predictably tantamount to burying new ideas for intervention, the future of youth policies in Berkeley seemed bleak indeed.

Berkeley's modern dilemma

Of course, Berkeley is not the entire United States. But its story could be paralleled in similar communities—Madison, Ann Arbor, Cambridge—and reflects a common American problem. Is it possible for a community to sustain a commitment to Berkeley's kind of pluralism while acting concertedly on behalf of its youth? Berkeley's experience suggests that the difficulties are great indeed. During the past decade and a half, the cult of unrestrained individualism has helped rationalize fragmentation, isolation, and lack of coordination among service providers. It has shaken to the core the legitimacy of public efforts to articulate goals, behavioral standards, and program innovations for youth. By insistently stressing diversity and the cultural, ideological, and political differences such diversity implies, the new Berkeley ethos has undermined a long tradition of communitywide responsibility for youth.

Should we blithely conclude, then, that Berkeley's extension of the widest possible range of freedom to its individual youth and to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

its varied groups doesn't work, and dismiss Berkeley's recent history as a disastrous blind alley? Certainly, the ascendancy of individualism has confounded social and educational planning for youth. But the "good old days" where self-appointed civic leaders generalized grandly about what *all* youth needed to make them industrious, content, and righteous are long gone. These standards and values have long since eroded, especially in as self-consciously "modern" a city as Berkeley. Equally important, the growing acceptance of diverse values and standards represents a notable contribution to American democratic practice. The self-conscious inclusion of, respect for, and accommodation to different viewpoints and constituencies at all levels of policymaking and policy implementation reinforces while it extends several of our most cherished social values.

Berkeley thus finds itself on the cutting edge of a distinctly modern dilemma—the reconciliation of individualism and consensus in the search for "progressive" public policies aimed at youth. The leaders of Berkeley have not figured out how to give each of these values political expression without immobilizing social policy. The best that can be said is that at least a few of them have begun to acknowledge the stalemate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The battle over gun control

DON B. KATES, JR.

IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR, Congress passed the Firearms Owners Protection Act. This act, the first federal gun law to pass in eighteen years, actually *reduces* the restrictions of the 1968 Gun Control Act. The often fierce debate that accompanied the passage of this legislation, though, demonstrated once again the political struggle over gun control in this country.

Most Americans think that controlling weapons is just plain sensible. Opinion polls show that most gun owners are actually of one mind with the general public in favoring it. For example, both gun owners and the public, by and large, favor such steps as the registration and licensing of guns and the banning of gun ownership to felons, juveniles, and the mentally impaired. Advocates of reasonable gun control approach guns pragmatically rather than ethically, viewing them as widely desired but nevertheless dangerous things which are sensible to control. Curtailing criminal misuse of guns is, of course, a prime concern of this procontrol thinking.

But the cause of reasonable gun control has been hampered in recent years by the presence among gun control advocates of a vocal minority motivated not by pragmatic concerns—that gun control will reduce crime, for example—but by a moral vision that reviles guns and their owners. This antigun lobby sees the handgun simply

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as an abomination, and the desire to possess one for the protection of home and family, or for any other reason, as immoral, reactionary, and paranoid.[1] It supports the banning—not just the controlling—of handguns and, hence, has refused to support a loosening of even the most excessive handgun regulations.

The reaction of gun owners to such opposition has been predictable. Feeling offended, and perhaps even threatened, by antigun rhetoric, the gun lobby has opposed even the most moderate controls. To understand the difference this antigun position has made, as opposed to the reaction a merely "procontrol" view would elicit, it is useful to remember that gun owners have not always opposed gun control. Most of our present gun laws, in fact, come from the Uniform Revolver Act which the NRA drafted and promoted early in this century. As late as 1957, legislation to bar military surplus imports was sponsored in the Senate by NRA life member John F. Kennedy. (Ironically, his purpose was not to prevent crime but to protect the domestic arms industry centered in the New England states.)

In focusing on the baleful effect of antigun rhetoric, I am not denying that gun owners are often equally intemperate. But though their intemperance is notoriously counterproductive, it hurts the gun lobby far less than antigun vituperation hurts the cause of reasonable gun control. For the strident opposition to gun ownership that characterizes the antigun lobby foredooms the cooperation that is essential if better controls are to be enacted and obeyed. A situation has developed, then, in which no matter how reasonable in the abstract a gun control proposal might seem, gun owners think it will end up being administered from an antigun perspective.

Arbitrary administration

The history of American gun law and its enforcement unfortunately lends credence to the paranoia gun owners feel as a beleaguered minority. The Sullivan Law as administered in New York City is a case in point. Enacted in 1911, it made New York the first state to require a permit for a handgun on one's own premises (to this date, only a few states require such a permit). Support for its passage came not from liberal reformers interested in limiting crime —their focus at the time was liquor, not guns (indeed, such liberals

[1] The tone of antigun opposition to gun owners themselves can be seen by surveying the titles of typical antigun articles: "Sex Education Belongs in the Gun Store," "Bulletbrains and the Guns that Don't Kill," "NRA Can't Wash the Blood Off Its Tired Old Clichés," "Handgun Nuts Are Just That—Really Nuts," "Neurotic Attachment to Guns," and so on.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as Teddy Roosevelt, his niece Eleanor, and Drew Pearson carried guns for their own protection)—but from business and the then-conservative American Bar Association which associated handguns with foreign-born anarchists, labor agitators, and criminals. Articles, not just editorials, in conservative papers like the *New York Times* spoke of "low-browed foreigners" prowling gun shops for bargains; handguns reposing "chiefly in the pockets of ignorant and quarrelsome immigrants of lawbreaking propensities"; and "the practice of going armed . . . among citizens of foreign birth."

Though permit denial was at first concentrated in the Italian and Jewish areas, over the years it became the unacknowledged mechanism for banning handguns to the general population. New York decided in 1957, for example, that target shooting was no longer a legitimate reason for handgun ownership; permits would henceforth be issued only to businessmen, security guards, and a select few wanting guns for their own protection. By the early 1970s, this policy of progressively limiting permits given to ordinary citizens had reduced premises permits to less than one-seventh the number issued in London (although New York City was estimated to have one to two million unpermitted handguns). When New York appellate courts held that applicants could only be rejected if found unfit, New York City simply ignored the rulings. When the gun lobby obtained injunctions forcing the city to comply, it did, but only after establishing a two-year wait to obtain the gun-permit form. Finally, when the New York legislature reaffirmed the court decision and ordered that permit approvals or denials be made within six months, the city imposed an enormous processing fee, making application and renewal economically feasible only for the well-to-do.

"Carry" permits and the perquisites of privilege

The most desired handgun permit is not the premises permit but the "carry," which allows the holder to have a gun wherever he goes. Even states that do not require permits to keep a handgun at home tend to limit carry permits severely. But New York City's policy of limiting handgun ownership seems to apply only to ordinary citizens, not to those influential enough to qualify for the carry permit. By the 1970s, although only about 550 premises permits were issued each year, 25,000 carry permits were issued in New York City. Though the lists of permit holders in the city are legally public record, New York suppressed them until 1980, when a journalist obtained a court order demanding they be given to him. A subsequent newspaper article described the permit holders as "entertain-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers, publishers, media stars, [and] politicians of all stripes." Among the nationally prominent people on that and later lists (or an alleged list leaked in 1976) were David, John, Laurence, and Winthrop Rockefeller, Leland DuPont, Henry Cabot Lodge, Robert Goulet, Sid Caesar, Donald Trump, William Buckley, Michael Korda, Arthur Godfrey, and Lyman Bloomingdale. Ironically, also named in news articles as permit holders have been such prominent gun control advocates as John Lindsay, Nelson Rockefeller, and Arthur Sulzberger, publisher of the *New York Times*. Dr. Joyce Brothers, who says gun ownership indicates male sexual dysfunction, was not listed; her husband was.

Of course such prominent people may face dangers to which the ordinary citizen is not exposed. For instance, the only carry permit issued in San Francisco in 1980 went to then-Supervisor Diane Feinstein after her house was machine-gunned by the New World Liberation Front. But does such special danger justify such singular privilege? Contrast Feinstein's situation to that of an ordinary San Franciscan. He is an elderly Chicano whom the *San Francisco Examiner* reports has held on to his grocery by outshooting fifteen armed robbers; nearby stores have closed because thugs have either bankrupted them or have casually executed their unresisting proprietors. Permit or not, this grocer has to carry a gun to and from his store. But in San Francisco, permits are available only to politicians and the very wealthy, whose lifestyles exempt them from the common crimes against which a gun may have utility. Yet since personal firearms can do little to protect against the special dangers prominent people face, it seems, then, that handgun permits are available only to those who need them least.

That Feinstein received the only carry permit in the city should (and in any other context would) have outraged those most concerned with equality before the law. If permits are to be issued to those with influence who may fear for their safety, they should be available to the ordinary citizen also threatened by some kind of criminal violence.

Condoning permit abuse

Of course, the fact that a few prominent antigun spokesmen may be hypocritical does not nullify the need for permit laws. Carrying a gun for protection does, in fact, occasion far more difficult decisions about its use than keeping a gun at home. Felonious endangerment and necessity to shoot are reasonably clear when a burglar or rapist breaks into occupied premises. Street incidents, in con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trast, may require training and knowledge to evaluate when to shoot.[2] The solution to discrimination in permit administration, then, is not to abandon the law, but to correct abuses of it. Unfortunately, in this case, the forces that normally defend Americans from government abuse are suffused with the sentiments which prompted the abuses in the first place.

Arbitrary and discriminatory administration is seen as acceptable in the antigun view. If common citizens who want a handgun to protect home and family are held to be sexually aberrant, paranoid, trigger-happy rednecks whom it is imperative to disarm, almost any means that does so is likely to seem justified. The National Coalition to Ban Handguns (NCBH) actually touts New York City as a model for gun control everywhere. (For obvious reasons, the NCBH does not discuss the issue of discriminatory administration.) When such a discussion was forced on the NCBH's principal spokesman, his response was significant: He blithely replied that there is no problem so long as permits are confined to people like *Times* publisher Sulzberger (whom he described familiarly as "Punch"), who are obviously not criminals.

Apparently, the NCBH is not concerned with a discriminatory administration that grants a gun permit to "Punch" Sulzberger but denies one to those who may have legitimate concerns for their safety: grocers in Spanish Harlem; welfare recipients whom robbers target, knowing when their checks come and where they cash them; the elderly trapped in deteriorating neighborhoods (like the Manhattan couple who in 1976 hanged themselves in despair over repeatedly losing their pension checks and furnishings to robbers). But even if, as the NCBH argues, guns do not provide protection from violent crime, common citizens in a violent society have at least as much right to one as do the prominent and wealthy. Moreover, the speculations and anecdotal local data long cited to show the uselessness of handguns is now contradicted by solid national data. According to this data, handgun-armed citizens actually thwart about as many crimes annually as handgun-armed criminals succeed in committing. Citizens acting in legitimate self-defense kill about three times more assailants and robbers than do police.[3] Furthermore, prison surveys show many criminals, fearing armed victims more than the police, are deterred into nonconfrontational crime.

---

[2] Unfortunately, neither in New York, San Francisco, nor virtually anywhere else are carry permits conditioned on in-depth testing of when to shoot. Only a very few jurisdictions test marksmanship at all.

[3] Gary Kleck, "Policy Lessons from Recent Gun Control Research," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Winter 1986).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The only article of the antigun faith supported by modern research is that the handgun is rarely used against burglars—not, however, because it is inherently ineffective but because burglars usually strike unoccupied premises. Yet it turns out that a burglar's chances of being caught, prosecuted, and actually serving time are even less than that of his meeting an armed citizen. Gun ownership, it seems, is a greater deterrent to crime.

Other antigun activists have not always practiced the NCBH's prudent silence about gun permit abuses; some even endorse these abuses outright. The premier antigun writer, Carl Bakal, approvingly cites such examples as denial of a New York permit to a "rifle instructor with a spotless record" because a relative "had been in trouble with the police." A former St. Louis alderman described gun law administration in that city (under Missouri permit requirements) as the automatic rejection of applications from nonvoters, homosexuals, and women lacking written permission from their husbands. He offered no defense of this discrimination as policy, approving only of the result—that the applicants were denied handgun ownership, as he thinks all ordinary citizens should be.

Discriminatory punishment

Some states have no system under which one can even apply for a permit to carry a protective firearm. While this avoids Sullivan Law-type formal discrimination, enforcement is so arbitrary that violation becomes certain. When a physician has been maimed or murdered by frantic drug addicts who think he must be carrying drugs, for example, his colleagues are unlikely to be deterred from carrying a handgun because they lack a permit; nor are judges —many of whom carry guns themselves because of threats from criminals—likely to jail them, even if they are prosecuted.

The NCBH, though, has the antidote for such "soft judges": legislatively *mandate* a year in prison for citizens caught carrying a gun—even if they are doing so in necessary self-defense and lack a permit only because these are unavailable to ordinary citizens. Massachusetts, which pioneered such legislation, recently sent a man to prison for carrying a handgun with which he had shot a coworker when knifed by him in a subway station. (The man had begun carrying the gun only after he received threats from the coworker.) In affirming the sentence, the state's high court wrote:

> We are not unaware that some may say that the defendant is to be punished for acting reasonably in face of a serious and real threat. [The defendant did not merely arm himself out of some fear of crime in general.] It

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> was founded on an earlier assault by Michel with a knife and became a real and direct danger when Michel attacked the defendant with a knife at the [subway] station. We are also advised from the record that the defendant is a hardworking family man, without a criminal record, who was respected by his fellow employees (Michel excepted). Michel, on the other hand, appeared to have lacked the same redeeming qualities. He was a convicted felon who had serious charges pending against him at the time of [the defendant's] trial (quite apart from the charge of assaulting the defendant). It is possible that the defendant is alive today only because he carried a gun that day for protection. Before [the legislature mandated the one-year minimum] sentence, [such] special circumstances involving the accused could be reflected reasonably in the sentencing or dispositional aspect of the proceeding. That option is no longer open to the judicial branch of government.

Leniency may be even less forthcoming for the disadvantaged and minorities, despite their greater need for protection. In a case that received national publicity several years ago, a black woman, upon entering her housing project, found that a man had broken through a thin wall, raped her roommate, and thrown her out of the fifteenth-story window. The woman, brandishing a handgun, managed to frighten the assailant away. The police arrived too late to capture him, but they did arrest her for carrying the handgun.

Judges find that the vast majority of defendants charged with carrying a gun illegally (in states without carry permits or where permits are denied to citizens without political influence) have no criminal record. They are secretaries, shopkeepers, the poor, the elderly, many of whom carry guns because they have been raped or mugged with the police arriving too late to protect them. A judge in Chicago's "gun court," writing in a local legal publication, notes that his readers

> would not go into ghetto areas except in broad daylight under the most optimum conditions—surely not at night, alone, or on foot. But some people have no choice. To live or work or have some need to be on this "frontier" imposes a fear which is tempered by possession of a gun.

Antigun advocates do not grasp (not even for the purpose of refuting it) the idea that banning handguns might burden the poor and minorities, those most subject to crime. Consider the following from the NCBH's "20 Questions and Answers on Gun Control":

> Q. Does the banning of handguns discriminate against minority members of our society?
>
> A. No. Handguns would be illegal in the hands of the total populace, including all racial and religious groups, the rich and the poor alike.

Yes—and to sleep under bridges is forbidden equally to the rich and the poor alike.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The gun laws of '68

In the wake of the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the Congress hastily passed—over bitter NRA opposition—the Gun Control Act of 1968. This act created a maze of regulatory laws, violations which were to be considered not misdemeanors but felonies—and for which neither good intent nor lack of knowledge could be used in defense. That this act has had little or no crime-reductive value is conceded by all sides in the gun debate. But the repeated and varied injustices to which it has given rise have confirmed gun owners in their belief in the malignant intent and effect of gun control.

In one typical case a man and wife who owned a gun store were convicted of an "illegal" sale at a gun show although they had all the various licenses and had obtained all the necessary purchase-record information. Unbeknown to them, the unintended effect of an obscure regulation precluded licensees from selling at gun shows —although unlicensed private citizens could do so without keeping records at all. Required to convict them, the trial court imposed a sentence of only one day—on probation; the court of appeals, in affirming, took the unusual step of recommending a presidential pardon. Nevertheless the couple lost their business, because felons cannot possess guns. This type of injustice is what the recently passed Firearms Owners Protection Act sought to correct.

A further flaw in the 1968 act is its failure to define who actually is a gun dealer. Obviously a gun store owner is a dealer, but so also are many people who would not normally think of themselves as such—and who find themselves subject to felony penalties if they fail to obtain the proper licenses or to keep the required records. A sporting goods importer, for example, ran into trouble with the law when be bought sixteen thousand starter pistols—despite his desperate attempts to cancel the order when he found that they were convertible to firearms. A police officer who on retirement sells to fellow officers the eight handguns he accumulated in his over-thirty years of service is liable for prosecution. So is an executor who never personally owned a gun but tried to obtain full value for the estate by selling the deceased's collection (comprising all rifles used by the various powers in World War I) as a collection rather than breaking it up and selling the guns individually to gun stores at perhaps 50 percent of their value. Each of these people is, without knowledge or intent, guilty of multiple felonies under the 1968 federal act.

Further exacerbating this injustice is the fact that, even if these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people had known enough to consult the agency which administers the act, they would have probably been told that they were not dealers and would not need licensure as such. A combination of frequent changes in administrative policy, ineptitude in implementing them, and the act's complexity and ambiguity has resulted in cases where citizens were misadvised that they could engage in activities for which they were later convicted. Such convictions are routinely upheld: Agencies cannot authorize violations of a statute by misinterpreting it.

Given how complex and poorly written the 1968 act is, agency misinterpretations are understandable. But that does not explain the fact that those in the agency responsible for search and seizure and enforcement practices have, in the words of antigun journalist Robert Sherrill, "shown less awareness of the Constitution than any other group of law enforcement officials at any level of government, with the possible exception of Mississippi sheriffs." After subsequent extensive Senate hearings, Sherrill's views were reiterated (somewhat less pungently) in a 1982 Senate Judiciary Committee report:

> [The testimony reveals] conduct by an official law enforcement agency of the federal government that borders on the criminal. . . .
>
> Based upon these hearings, it is apparent that the enforcement tactics made possible by current firearms laws are constitutionally, legally and practically reprehensible. . . .
>
> [The agency] has primarily devoted its firearms enforcement efforts to the apprehension . . . of individuals who lack all criminal intent and knowledge. . . . Since existing law permits [such prosecutions], numerous collectors have been ruined by a felony record carrying a potential sentence of five years in a federal prison. Even in cases where the collectors secured acquittal, or [where charges were dropped], agents . . . have generally confiscated the entire collection of the potential defendant. . . .

The American Civil Liberties Union, if it simply displayed its normal fidelity to constitutional rights, could dispel the beleaguered-minority paranoia that gun owners suffer. The ACLU could, for example, sue on behalf of gun owners whose civil liberties are violated and recognize that the Second Amendment guarantees a constitutional right to bear arms. Instead the ACLU characterizes the Second Amendment as guaranteeing not an individual right to arms, but only a state right.[4] Furthermore, the ACLU shuns litigation

[4] One may deride the NRA's reading of the Second Amendment as a guarantee against every form of gun control conceivable. But that it guarantees responsible adults the right to possess handguns for home defense is established by: its background in classical liberal thought and common law; the plainly expressed views of the Founding Fathers; its legislative history; and its uniform treatment in legal commentaries from 1791 until recent times.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

against discriminatory abuses in state permit laws or the federal gun agency's violations of civil liberties.[5]

The ACLU was, in fact, a founding member of the NCBH, which strongly opposed holding any hearings on agency abuse. When hearings were held, the NCBH denied throughout them that there were any civil liberties violations. Instead the NCBH denounced "the NRA's megalomania about the so-called rights of gun owners. . . ." Regrettably, the evidence these hearings provide of massive agency misconduct has been completely ignored by the antigun civil liberties establishment. Indeed antigun organizations put forth an all-out effort to defeat the corrective legislation which has just passed Congress, despite the fact that the abuses to be corrected served no gun control purpose but only injured individual owners. In the light of such indifference from the civil liberties establishment to government abuses of gun owner rights, is it any wonder that gun owners militantly oppose any additions to government power that might also be used unreasonably against them?

Antigun advocacy—a symbolic crusade?

Why do antigun organizations and spokesmen play into the gun lobby's hands by making statements that inevitably cement millions of gun owners into fanatic opposition to control? Perhaps their motivations resemble those of the temperance crusaders earlier in this century, as explained in sociologist Joseph Gusfield's *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement.* Gusfield suggests that what Prohibition advocates were seeking was not so much to change human behavior but to legally enshrine their own morality while condemning that of their opponents.

That this is the case can be seen in the systematic avoidance by handgun ban advocates of the key criminological issue: enforcibility. Learned diatribes against the constitutional sanctity or defensive value of handguns abound—but never addressed is the issue of how handguns are to be confiscated from the forty to fifty million owners who disagree. Enforcement problems will dwarf those of Prohibition's. Handguns, unlike liquor, are reusable, and their continued use does not involve the visibility and risk of perpetual illegal purchase. A ban would not even prevent handgun proliferation: witness the extent of drug smuggling. Moreover, handguns could be sold more cheaply on the black market than they are now legally.

[5] The ACLU has, however, recently filed an amicus brief in the Supreme Court urging invalidation of a provision of the 1968 act under which no one who has ever been committed to a mental asylum may obtain permission to have a gun.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Any machine shop and many home workshops can produce, at a fraction of the cost of legal handguns, modern guns in cheap pot-metal versions which could suffice for the purposes of self-defence or of committing crime.

These facts are known to anyone who bothers to research enforcibility. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that neither these nor other enforcement issues are ever analyzed in even scholarly arguments for handgun prohibition. (One ten-thousand word article—which is atypical in that it at least notices the issue—devotes but a single sentence to the need for "strict enforcement.") How can people who in other situations trumpet enforcibility obstacles advocate banning handguns without ever even addressing the enforcement issue? I submit that it is only because a handgun ban is to them purely symbolic moral legislation rather than a serious criminological program.

Whether law ought to ratify a purely symbolic moral position held by most of the population is a debatable issue. But in our context it is irrelevant, for most Americans do not share the antigun belief in the innate depravity of gun ownership. The irony is that attempts nevertheless to reify that belief into law blight the chances for the kind of pragmatic gun control most Americans, including most gun owners, would support.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Deficit delusion

LAURENCE J. KOTLIKOFF

THE LAST FIVE YEARS have witnessed an enormous hue and cry over federal government deficits. No wonder. Since 1981 government debt held by the public has more than doubled. The current $1.7 trillion in debt corresponds to over $7,000 for each man, woman, and child in the country. The interest alone on this debt will total roughly $600 per person this year.

The government has not blithely accumulated this debt. Rather, it has done so with considerable and sincere hand-wringing culminating in the unprecedented Gramm-Rudman legislation. This law mandates automatic spending cuts over the next five years if deficits exceed specified levels. The deficits have also captured the attention of the media and the American public to the point where deficits are now widely viewed as the country's number one economic problem.

Given the strength of concern over recent deficits, it is surprising that so much has been made of the numbers and so little attention has been devoted to asking what exactly these numbers measure —and whether they should be causing so much alarm. Indeed, the notion that these deficit numbers are meaningful indices of economic difficulties is so instilled in our collective perceptions that the thesis of this article will surely disturb many readers.

This thesis is that the deficit is an inherently arbitrary accounting construct that provides no real guide to fiscal policy. The fact that the definition of deficits is so arbitrary means that even adjusting the official numbers for inflation, the increase in government

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assets, full employment, etc. will still leave an arbitrarily defined number that has no necessary relationship to the fundamentals of the government's fiscal behavior.

Such improved deficit accounting has recently been espoused in this publication by Robert Eisner and Paul Pieper.[1] In their view, there are right and wrong ways to measure deficits, and the government has simply chosen the wrong way. Their analysis usefully illustrates the variety of deficits one can define, based on officially defined assets and liabilities alone. But their discussion misses the more fundamental point that the official labelling of something as an asset or a liability is an arbitrary choice that has no general basis in economic theory, and certainly not in the economic theory that underlies the concern about deficit finance.

Part of the problem in recognizing and discussing the arbitrariness of the government's language is that this language is all we've got. Using words like "deficits," "taxes," and "spending" presupposes that these are well-defined concepts, which they are not. Hence, one has to use more neutral terms, such as "receipts" and "payments," to avoid the circularity inherent in using ill-defined terms and to emphasize their lack of definition.

Labelling receipts and payments

The government can be described in terms of this more neutral language as simply an institution that, over time, takes in receipts and makes payments. The only real constraint facing the government is that its receipts (including those from printing money) be sufficient to cover its payments. In the most basic terms we can view the government as consisting of a single individual, called the Treasurer, who is in charge of the government's interest-bearing checking account. All monies deposited in the account, including accrued interest, are receipts, while all checks written correspond to payments. The Treasurer decides how much money to take in as receipts and how much to pay out. But the Treasurer isn't free to bounce checks.

The Treasurer's choice of labelling specific receipts as "taxes," "borrowing," "receipts from sale of assets," "receipts from printing money," or "interest received" is entirely arbitrary. Equally arbitrary is his choice to label specific government payments as "consumption," "purchase of assets," "transfer payments," and "interest

[1] Robert Eisner and Paul J. Pieper, "How To Make Sense of the Deficit," *The Public Interest* No. 78 (Winter 1985), pp. 101-118.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and principal payments." The particular labels chosen by the Treasurer should be of complete indifference to the citizens, who are concerned not with what receipts and payments are called, but rather with the difference over their lifetimes in their payments to the government and their receipts from the government.

To see how arbitrary is the choice of labelling, consider the following example. Suppose that the Treasurer has chosen labels for all current and future receipts and payments with the exception of those involving Mr. X in the two years when Mr. X is age forty and age fifty. At age forty Mr. X pays the government $1,000, and at age fifty Mr. X receives $1,500 back from the government. Assume that the $500 equals ten years accumulated interest on the $1,000.

The Treasurer might label the $1,000 receipt "taxes" from Mr. X and the $1,500 repayment "transfer payments" to Mr. X. Alternatively, he could label the $1,000 receipt "borrowing" from Mr. X and call $500 of the $1,500 payment "interest payments" and the rest "repayment of principal." A third possibility is to label $500 of the initial $1,000 "taxes" and the other $500 "borrowing." Half of the $1,500 subsequent payment from the government could then be labelled "transfers" and the other half "repayment of principal plus interest." A fourth possibility is the Treasurer's labelling the $1,000 net receipt as "borrowing" of $2,000 less "transfer payments" of $1,000, and the net payment of $1,500 could be labelled "interest plus principal payments" of $3,000 less "taxes" of $1,500. All of these possibilities have a significant impact on that which we call the "deficit," as is shown in Table I.

Since the net receipts and net payments of the government are identical in each of the four cases, the real behavior of the economy will be the same in each case. However, the reported deficit will

Table I. Government "Deficit": Four Cases

	Labelling		*Impact on "Deficit"*	
Case	*Mr. X's $1,000 Net Payment*	*Mr. X's $1,500 Net Receipt*	*When Mr. X is Age 40*	*When Mr. X is Age 50*
1	"Taxes"	"Transfers"	− $1,000	+ $1,500
2	"Borrowing"	"Interest + Principal"	No Change	No Change
3	$500 "Borrowing"	$750 "Interest + Principal"	− $500	+ $750
	$500 "Taxes"	$750 "Transfers"		
4	$2,000 "Borrowing"	$3,000 "Interest + Principal"	+ $1,000	− $1,500
	$1,000 "Transfers"	$1,500 "Taxes"		

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

differ. In Case 1 the labelling leads to a $1000 smaller deficit when Mr. X is forty and a $1,500 larger deficit when Mr. X is fifty. Case 2 is the base case in which the reported deficit is unchanged. Case 3, like Case 1, involves an initially smaller reported deficit and a subsequently larger reported deficit. Case 4 produces the opposite result; with this labelling the government reports a $1,000 larger deficit when Mr. X is forty and a $1,500 smaller deficit when Mr. X is fifty.

It is important to understand that the example doesn't hinge on the $1,500 equalling $1,000 plus ten years of interest. Suppose Mr. X's receipt at age fifty equals $2,000. If $500 of this $2,000 is labelled "transfers," then we are left with the same question of how to label a $1000 payment of Mr. X at age forty and the remaining $1,500 receipt at age fifty.

These examples, by the way, have nothing to do with the issues of measurement raised by Eisner and Pieper. The same problems of arbitrary labels would arise if one made all their recommended measurement adjustments.

Of course, the Treasurer in this economy is free to play the receipt-and-payment-labelling games with all the country's citizens. It should thus be clear that the Treasurer is able to engage in exactly the same economic policy while reporting essentially whatever amount of debt or surplus he prefers. It should also be clear that, since the economy is not affected one iota by the change in labels, economics *per se* will provide no guide to the choice of labels.

Stated differently, from the perspective of economics the choice of labels is totally arbitrary, as is the reported level of government debt. The logical conclusion to draw from this is that one cannot learn anything about the underlying economy by considering only the size of its officially reported debt.

The Social Security "tax"

Lest one view the prior discussion as purely academic and somehow irrelevant to the United States, consider the labelling of the U.S. Social Security system, and, more specifically, the use of the word "taxes" to describe the FICA payments you and your employer make to the government. Why is the word "taxes" used? It is used because the government arbitrarily chose that word back in 1936 or thereabouts. But suppose we label these payments to the government differently. Let's label them "loans" from you to the government. Let's also label Social Security benefit payments "return of principal plus interest."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Note that, from your point of view, the new terminology is not completely foreign. With the new jargon you can now think of yourselves as lending money to the government (in the form of Social Security contributions) during your working years and receiving principal plus interest (in the form of Social Security benefit payments) during your retirement.

Surely this sequence of payments and receipts is very similar to those associated with purchasing a Treasury bond. When you purchase a Treasury bond or other security you make payments to the government now in exchange for receipts from the government later. Hence, from your point of view, your payment of what is called Social Security "taxes" is, in most respects, equivalent to your purchase of a government liability. While the return and risk properties of your invisible Social Security bonds differ from those of official government bonds (which, by the way, are subject to considerable revaluation risk), such a difference provides no basis for labelling one set of payments to the government "taxes" and the other set of payments "loans."

Let's now make the invisible Social Security bonds visible by supposing that the federal government, starting at the inception of the Social Security system, had also adopted the language of lending and borrowing to describe its flows of payments from and to the public sector—and, indeed, had issued explicit Social Security bonds to the public in exchange for Social Security contributions. We are supposing then that the Social Security system sends a piece of paper marked Social Security Bond to each worker in exchange for his or her Social Security contributions.

These pieces of paper would give the worker formal title to the return of his taxes plus interest as determined by the government. The interest paid on these Social Security bonds would not necessarily correspond to a market rate of return. Nor would the amount of interest be guaranteed; rather it would depend on Social Security's financial condition, in just the same way that, under current language, what are called Social Security "benefits" are not guaranteed and may be adjusted by Congress in light of Social Security's financial projections. The value of a worker's or retiree's Social Security bonds, like the value of Treasury bonds, would correspond to the risk-adjusted expected present value of the future return of principal and interest.

Consider now the impact on the government's measure of official debt of switching from the "tax"/"transfer" language to the language of "lending" and "repayment." Table II reproduces a table

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Table II. Federal Net Liabilities and Social Security Debt
(Billions of 1985 Dollars)[a]

Year	Gross Financial Liabilities		Net Financial Liabilities	Tangible Assets	Social Security Debt	Total Net Debt[b]
	Book Value	Market Value	Market Value	Replacement Cost		
1950	1,053	1,060	864	494	319	750
1955	1,000	986	772	730	1,401	1,529
1960	944	936	712	711	1,742	1,812
1965	998	970	691	759	1,889	1,880
1966	1,002	981	686	758	1,984	1,975
1967	1,021	984	692	770	1,803	1,798
1968	1,032	989	680	775	2,225	2,205
1969	998	933	617	787	2,096	2,008
1970	1,010	992	653	776	2,675	2,636
1971	1,032	1,028	683	768	3,146	3,144
1972	1,044	1,028	672	771	3,330	3,315
1973	1,053	1,025	618	798	4,104	4,007
1974	1,040	1,014	553	825	4,528	4,333
1975	1,131	1,119	679	815	4,826	4,761
1976	1,224	1,240	772	827	4,986	4,996
1977	1,278	1,262	780	860	5,343	5,320
1978	1,335	1,280	734	889		
1979	1,344	1,279	606	938		
1980	1,391	1,304	598	966		

[a] *Source:* 1982 Economic Report of the President, Table 4.5.
[b] This column equals the sum of columns three and five less column four and less the Social Security Trust Fund.

from the *1982 Economic Report of the President*, except that all figures are in billions of 1985 dollars. The first column shows the book value of gross federal debt. If we make one of the adjustments advocated by Eisner and Pieper and measure debt at market rather than book value, we arrive at column two. Subtracting column four, which gives the government's tangible assets, from column three, which gives its net financial liabilities, indicates the government's official net debt (or, in the case of a surplus, official net worth). It is this figure that Eisner and Pieper view as the correct series for government debt.

The fifth column in the table presents estimates of the value of invisible Social Security bonds. In 1977, the last year for which the data is available, the estimated value of Social Security debt was $5.34 trillion. In contrast, the value of official net debt (net financial liabilities less tangible assets) as reckoned by Eisner and Pieper

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was actually negative $80 billion in 1977—that is, on its official account the government had an $80 billion surplus in 1977. But including Social Security debt less Social Security's trust fund along with net official debt would enormously alter one's notion of the correct figure for government debt, changing the 1977 debt from negative $80 billion to the $5.32 trillion figure in column six. With this change in bookkeeping, the government would have reported official deficits, measured in 1986 dollars, in the respective years 1969 and 1970, of $628 billion and $508 billion! During the period 1971 through 1977, official deficits would have averaged $363 billion.

Presumably, had the nation become accustomed to living with such large deficits in the 1970s, there would have been considerably less anxiety about policies that increased reported deficits by only $200 billion in the 1980s.

A payment by any other name

One response to the Social Security illustration is that, unlike the purchase of official government bonds, the purchase of Social Security bonds is not voluntary. While this is true, the fact that payments to Social Security are mandated by law is likely to have either minor economic implications or none at all. Consider first the case in which there is no such legal mandate and in which Social Security bonds pay the same return as long-term official government bonds. For those households that have enough liquid assets on hand (or can borrow against their illiquid assets) to purchase the Social Security bonds, such a purchase will not affect their economic opportunities or their economic choices. A number of recent studies indicate that the overwhelming majority of American households are not liquidity constrained and could afford to make such a purchase.

Next consider the case in which Social Security pays less, after adjusting for risk, than the market rate of interest on official government bonds. In this case we can simply relabel Social Security's receipts and payments on its bonds as constituting the sum of: (1) "the purchase of Social Security bonds"; (2) "the repayment of principal plus market interest"; and (3) a "tax" equal to the difference between the market rate of interest on official bonds and the rate of interest Social Security can afford to pay. While all Social Security participants will be unhappy because of the "tax" component of the system's return, the economic situation of nonliquidity-constrained participants will not be affected.

In sum, while the voluntary nature of a government's receipts might provide a basis for distinguishing "borrowing" from "taxes"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a liquidity-constrained economy—that is, one in which most people could not afford such a voluntary purchase—the American economy is very far from being liquidity constrained. Indeed, the stock of U.S. private wealth currently exceeds $12 trillion, while Social Security taxes are only $265 billion. Hence, the private sector has in assets more than forty-five times the amount of funds needed to purchase this year's Social Security bonds.

Perhaps the reason current labelling practices are viewed as meaningful by most economists and other students of economics is that most such individuals alive today were brought up on the very simple, if not simplistic, short-run Keynesian model. In this model, it is current income that is the driving determinant of the decision to consume and save, and household assets as well as future income play a quite negligible role. The Keynesian model thus effectively assumes that households are either partially or completely liquidity constrained.

The irony is that the Keynesian model generally suggests that "deficits" are good things—indeed the more the better. Despite this, most economists along with the rest of the country view current federal "deficits" with considerable trepidation.

The model underlying the concern with labelling is quite different from the Keynesian model. It is the Life Cycle Model of Saving put forward by Nobel Laureate Franco Modigliani, Robert Brumberg, and Albert Ando. In the Life Cycle Model, assets and lifetime earnings, not current income, play the key role, and agents are therefore not liquidity constrained. Unfortunately, this model (or any other neoclassical model) provides no guidance whatsoever as to the proper labelling of government receipts and expenditures. Stated differently, the Life Cycle Model predicts the exact same economic events regardless of the choice of labels, and one can infer nothing about the stance of fiscal policy based simply on information about the amount of official debt.

"Debt" policy in the Life Cycle Model

In the Life Cycle Model, fiscal policies have real effects on the economy not because they are labelled one thing or another, but because they either (1) alter economic incentives, (2) redistribute within generations, or (3) redistribute across generations. It is this third issue, intergenerational redistribution, that underlies the concern about "deficits" from the perspective of the Life Cycle Model.

Intergenerational redistribution occurs whenever a government policy increases the present values of payments-less-receipts it makes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to some generations at the expense of reducing the present value of payments-less-receipts to other generations.

Consider, for different generations, what happens to the present value of lifetime payments-less-receipts when the government runs a policy it describes as a "tax cut," financed in the short run by what it calls a "deficit" and in the long run by what it calls a "tax increase" to pay the interest on the accumulated "debt."

Older generations are made better off by this policy. In the short run they have to pay less to the government, and at the time the tax increase occurs they may be dead, or if they are still alive they will only have to make the larger payments for a relatively short period of time. Hence, the present value of their lifetime receipts from the government less payments to the government increases.

Middle-age generations may also be better off. If, for example, the tax is assessed on earnings, middle-age generations make smaller payments to the government during the tax cut period, but may escape through retirement most or all of the subsequent larger payments arising from the tax increase.

Younger generations will, in contrast, be worse off because paying the higher amount of taxes for most of one's life will more than outweigh (in present value) the temporarily lower payments. Future generations will also be worse off because they will face higher net payments throughout their lives.

Thus the "tax cut" policy redistributes income from young and future generations to the currently middle-age and older generations. But note that the same fundamental policy could have been achieved with the government announcing a "surplus," rather than a "deficit" at the beginning of the policy. Rather than cutting taxes, the government could have increased transfer payments to middle-age and older generations to leave them in the same position as under the tax cut. For younger generations, the government could have announced a very major tax increase in the current period, coupled with future transfers to these generations that would have left the present value of their receipts-less-payments unchanged. Since future transfer payments don't show up on the government's current books, the government would announce a "surplus" with this change in labels. Hence, the "tax cut" policy could be relabelled a "tax increase" policy with no impact whatsoever on the policy's intergenerational redistribution.

However, intergenerational redistribution from younger and future generations to older generations does lower national saving because older generations will increase their consumption by more

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than younger generations lower their consumption. The reason is that older generations have fewer years left to live and consequently have fewer years over which to consume the additional resources. Younger generations, on the other hand, spread their reduction in lifetime resources over more years; hence their response to a decline in the present value of net lifetime receipts is to lower their consumption this year somewhat, knowing they will also lower their consumption for many years in the future. In the jargon of economists, older generations have larger marginal propensities to consume than younger generations.

Economists and others in the United States should indeed be concerned about this "crowding out" process. Since 1980 we have been saving only 5.1 percent of our net national product (NNP). In contrast we saved 7.7 percent of NNP in the 1970s, 8.7 percent in the 1960s, and 8.8 percent in the 1950s. Last year's saving rate of 4.4 percent is 50 percent lower than the saving rate of the 1950s.

Passing the intergenerational buck

Once one becomes attuned to thinking about debt policy in terms of intergenerational redistribution, it becomes clear that a variety of government policies, many of which have no direct effect on reported government "deficits," transfer resources from later to earlier generations. One somewhat subtle mechanism is running an unfunded "pay as you go" Social Security system.

In this Ponzi scheme younger working generations pay money to Social Security, which then hands the money over to older, retired generations in the form of "retirement benefits." Every generation pays for the retirement benefits of the previous generation—with one exception: At the initiation of the program, the first generation receives benefits without having had to finance the retirement of its immediate predecessors. This generation receives a windfall at the expense of younger and future generations who receive, on average, a lower rate of return on their Social Security contributions than they would if they had invested these funds privately.

While many of the big winners from Social Security are already deceased, there is still significant intergenerational redistribution underway. Middle-income household heads who were born in 1930 are predicted roughly to break even from the system. In contrast, middle-income household heads in the cohort to be born in 1990 are projected over their lifetimes to lose, on net, roughly $60,000 in present value as a consequence of participating in Social Security.

Another subtle intergenerational transfer mechanism is a change

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the tax base that shifts the burden of taxation from older to younger generations. An example here is switching from an income tax that taxes the capital income of the elderly as well as the labor earnings of the young and middle aged to a wage tax that hits only the young and middle aged. Increases in the progressivity of the income tax represent a variant of this type of fundamental debt policy. Switching from a less to a more progressive tax on earned income shifts more of the tax burden onto middle-aged and younger workers whose annual incomes are larger than those of retired elderly for whom taxable income consists primarily of the return on savings.

Perhaps the most subtle mechanism of intergenerational redistribution is government policy that lowers the market value of financial assets. Since older generations are the primary owners of assets, a reduction in asset values reduces the consumption opportunities of the elderly; at the same time it expands the consumption opportunities of younger generations who, through time, can purchase these assets from older generations at a lower price.

An example of such a policy is reducing investment incentives, which, by the way, is part of the president's tax reform proposal. Since investment incentives in the United States are effectively restricted to new investment, old capital—capital that has been fully or partially written off—sells at a discount reflecting the preferential tax treatment available to new capital. A reduction in investment incentives means a smaller discount on old capital, that is, a capital gain to owners of old capital. This capital gain accrues to older generations, and young and middle-aged generations are worse off because they must pay a higher price to acquire claims to the economy's capital stock.

What numbers should we look at?

If our official debt numbers are inherently arbitrary and provide no real guide to the extent and nature of fiscal policy's intergenerational redistribution, what numbers should one consider in assessing the government's fundamental debt policy? The answer is that we need to examine directly the lifetime budget constraints of different generations and ask whether government policies have expanded the lifetime consumption opportunities of older generations at the price of reduced lifetime consumption opportunities of younger and future generations. The answer to this question bears no relation to how we label particular receipts and payments between the private economy and the government. Accounting doesn't matter when looking at a generation's budget constraint, because the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bottom line is how much the generation can afford to consume; this depends on the generation's lifetime receipts from the government net of payments to the government, not on how particular receipts and payments are labelled.

Describing changes in the lifetime budget constraints of all current and successive generations is not easy. First, there are an infinite number of generations to think about. Second, there is great diversity within a generation. Presumably, one could address these concerns by presenting projected lifetime budget constraints for several representative generations and family types within each generation.

A third and much more difficult problem is accurately assessing the expected values of future receipts and payments of current and future generations. In forming such expected values one needs to take into account the likelihood that the government's policy will change in the future. Eisner and Pieper argue that such calculations would be subject to "huge uncertainty" since they involve future receipts and payments that are, in the words of the U.S. Treasury, "highly speculative." While it is easy simply to ignore numbers that are difficult to estimate, ignoring these numbers in considering fiscal policy is akin to navigating in Los Angeles using a highly detailed map of New York rather than a poorly detailed map of Los Angeles.

Reagan's "debt" policy

Having outlined these various mechanisms for running true economic debt policies and having argued that one cannot gauge these policies by looking at official debt numbers, it is time to look at the reality of recent economic debt (intergenerational transfer) policy. The Reagan personal income tax cuts have certainly enhanced the lifetime budgets of older generations at the expense of younger generations. But, up to the present, the magnitude of this intergenerational redistribution appears small when set against the massive intergenerational redistribution in the 1960s and 1970s associated with Social Security.

A second feature of Reagan's fiscal policy is the sizeable investment incentives passed in 1981. As just argued, this policy generates capital losses to owners of existing (old) capital and constitutes an economic surplus policy. The magnitude of this redistribution, when set against the redistribution from the tax cuts, appears to correspond to having postponed the tax cuts by roughly one year.

The reform in 1983 of the Social Security system constitutes a third significant fiscal policy altering the intergenerational resource distribution. As late as 1977, Social Security's long-run finances

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed fairly secure. But the ensuing recessions and other economic and demographic events changed the long-run as well as short-run picture. The 1983 reforms made very substantial cuts in the future benefits of all current young generations. The new Social Security law gradually raises the retirement age to sixty-seven and envisions, through the process of bracket creep, the eventual income taxation of Social Security benefits of all retirees, not simply high-income retirees as is now the case.

For current young generations these legislated long-term cuts in Social Security benefits are sizable when compared, for example, with the tax savings they have enjoyed to date from the Reagan tax cut. Hence, this policy also represents a significant economic surplus policy, since it is reducing the welfare of current young generations while helping assure that future generations will not have their Social Security contributions substantially raised.

My rough assessment is that the Reagan fiscal policy has to date generated, on net, a small economic surplus, although this assessment could change in the near future depending on policy decisions still to be made. However, whether one views the policy in toto as transferring to older or to younger generations, it is clear that the national hysteria concerning "deficits" has been predicated on a set of numbers that have little or no relationship to the issue of fundamental concern. Asserting that the deficit numbers "have no clothes" is not the same as asserting that all is fine in our economic house. On the contrary, it appears clear that the country is experiencing a long-term decline in saving which may well be the result of the unreported but enormous economic deficits associated with Social Security and other unfunded federal government retirement programs in the last three decades.

Given the nation's extremely low saving rate, the current concern about deficit policy is welcome, albeit, as it appears, about ten years too late. However, since our current fixation is on the official budget deficit and not on the fundamental course of intergenerational transfer policy, the concern is not likely to last. For once the official deficit number is fixed, through either a real or an accounting policy, the public and government will lose interest in the question of debt, and indeed may return to more of the kinds of *hidden* debt policies of the last thirty years. It is high time to remove the blinders. Fiscal illusion is a very real problem; it not only blinds us to current fiscal reality, it also leaves us little perspective on the real alternatives for improving our economic future.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American farm subsidies: a bumper crop

ELMER W. LEARN, PHILIP L. MARTIN & ALEX F. McCALLA

Those who till the soil are the chosen people of God.
Thomas Jefferson

DURING THE PAST two hundred years, Jefferson's maxim has become an integral part of American folklore and political rhetoric. Today, movies such as *Country* portray financially strapped farmers as victims of government policies —despite the fact that federal farm programs transferred an average of $12,000 to each farmer in 1983.

Obviously, the emotional support of the American public and the generosity of the federal government have not kept U.S. farmers from experiencing economic difficulties. Farm incomes and land prices are down sharply, and there are few prospects of enough increased domestic food and fiber consumption, or of a surge in exports, to raise them. In 1985, when Congress returned to its quadrennial debate over farm programs, it received contradictory recommendations even from farm organizations: some urged the government to intervene more in agriculture, while others asked the government to phase out commodity programs.

Agriculture is often considered the crown jewel of the U.S. economy, the economic sector whose efficiency is heralded around the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world. The record is indeed impressive: On a stable land base, American farm production has tripled since 1910 while employment in agriculture has fallen 80 percent. During the 1930s, average farm family incomes were less than half of average nonfarm incomes; today, many farm families earn as much as or more than nonfarm families, and most have much more wealth. But in the course of becoming so productive, the agricultural sector has been radically transformed.

This article explains how American agriculture has evolved into a tripartite system of large farms, mid-sized and small "family" farms, and still smaller "rural residences." This changed structure means that federal farm programs, developed in the 1930s to assist family farms, today bestow most of their benefits on large farms. The article also explores a possible policy alternative which could redirect those benefits to the farms they were meant to help and fulfill the farm programs' intended goals.

Big farms, small farms

A "farm" is officially defined as a place that sells at least $1,000 worth of farm products annually. In 1982 there were 2.4 million such farms, and the average farm family netted, according to *Agricultural Statistics*, $9,300 from farming. If farm families had only worked the farm, then, they would have had incomes lower than the poverty level. However, farm families averaged $16,400 each from nonfarm wages and salaries, dividends, and pensions, for a total annual income of $25,700. (In that same year the average U.S. family income was $24,200.)

But farm averages mask a considerable variation of economic welfare among farms, and it is more revealing to examine income and wealth when farms are divided into three groups: "rural residences"; "family farms," which can be divided into small and mid-sized; and large farms.

Half the number of all U.S. farms—1.2 million—sell less than $10,000 worth of farm products annually, and are considered "rural residences" (see Table I). In 1982 these rural residences together produced only 3 percent of all farm products. Rural residence families lose money farming, but their substantial nonfarm incomes and low living costs make them as well off as the average American family (see Table II). Rural residence farmers average farm assets over $134,000. A few of these farms have struggling full-time farmers, but most are part-time diversions for retirees or persons employed full-time in other jobs. This group of farms receives 7 percent of federal cash payments to farmers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Table I. Agricultural Production in 1982, by Farm Group[a]

	"Rural Residences"	*Small Family Farms*	*Mid-sized Family Farms*	*Large Farms*
Number of Farms	1,155,000	554,000	579,000	112,000
Percent of all Farms	48%	23%	24%	5%
Percent of Total Farm Production	3%	9%	39%	49%
Percent of direct cash payments received	7%	15%	56%	22%

[a] *Source:* D. Harrington and A. Manchester, "Profile of the U.S. Farm Sector," in *Agricultural-Food Policy Review*, USDA AER 530, 1985, p. 33.

About 112,000 large farms—equivalent to the number of farms in Minnesota alone—produce *half* the nation's food and fiber. These large farms, which sell more than $200,000 worth of farm products annually, average net farm incomes of almost $170,000 each. In 1982 the average large farm had assets worth over $2.3 million and an equity of $1.6 million. This group of farms receives 22 percent of the federal cash payments to farmers.

The remaining 1.1 million farms, each selling farm products worth $10,000-$200,000 annually, often fit the stereotype of the troubled "family farm." Half of these—one quarter of all farms—average sales from $10,000-$39,999; these small family farms on average lose $121 a year each, while together producing 9 percent of the nation's food. Small family farms have the lowest total family incomes, often because they are too big to allow the farmer to hold a full-time nonfarm job but not big enough to generate an adequate net farm income. Small farms average assets of $313,000 each, and together received 15 percent of all federal cash payments to farmers.

The other half of family farms sell farm products worth $40,000-$200,000 annually. These mid-sized farms include the 160-640 acre corn-soybean farms of the midwest, and usually require the part-time efforts of a spouse or children in addition to the full-time work

Table II. Average Farm Income and Assets in 1982, by Farm Group[a]

	"Rural Residences"	*Small Family Farms*	*Mid-sized Family Farms*	*Large Farms*
Average Net Farm Income	– $737	– $121	$10,100	$169,402
Average Net Nonfarm Income	$19,894	$15,092	$10,746	$16,696
Average Total Income	$19,157	$14,971	$20,846	$186,098
Average Assets Per Farm	$134,493	$313,372	$791,174	$2,337,491

[a] *Source:* D. Harrington and A. Manchester, "Profile of the U.S. Farm Sector," in *Agricultural-Food Policy Review*, USDA AER 530, 1985, p. 33.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the farmer. Such farms together produce 40 percent of all farm products, but generate on average only $10,000 of farm income each despite average farm assets of almost $800,000—a return of less than 2 percent. Mid-sized family farms often include at least one nonfarm worker, so the $21,000 average total income of this sub-group is close to the U.S. average. Together, mid-sized farms received 56 percent of all federal cash payments to farmers.

In sum, today's agricultural sector consists of 100,000 large and generally profitable farms, 1.2 million money-losing rural residences, and 1.1 million struggling small and mid-sized family farms. All share the name "farm," yet they have very little in common. It is hard to conceive of a realistic farm policy which can ever make rural residences and small family farms profitable, which means that 71 percent of all farms can be expected to lose money year after year. Helping family farms is also difficult because subsidy programs originally enacted to preserve a way of life wind up either increasing farm prices or financing the buying of surplus commodities from large farms. This federal assistance dilemma has its roots in the nature of the farm programs developed fifty years ago.

Why farm programs?

Farming differs from other production processes because of its biological character and its dependence on a relatively fixed supply of land. Since farming is land-intensive, it is dispersed throughout the nation; since the land supply is fixed, farmers must bid against other users to expand. During the 1970s, high farm prices, low interest rates (during a period of high inflation), new technologies, and tax laws encouraged farmers and nonfarm investors to bid up land prices. Rising land prices increased the wealth of landowners, and explain why some farmers lament that they "live poor and die rich."

Farmers produce essential food and fiber in a biological production process fraught with uncertainties. Weather and other unpredictable factors cause the supply of farm products to fluctuate, but the demand for food in industrial societies remains stable—the average American eats about 1,400 pounds of food annually regardless of farm prices. Consumers do shift between more and less expensive commodities as prices and incomes change, but such changes have relatively small effects. For example, despite extensive recent discussion about the harmful effects of too much red meat, the average American ate seventy-eight pounds of beef annually in the late 1960s and seventy-seven pounds in the early 1980s. Because of this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stable demand and fluctuating supply, relatively small commodity shortfalls or surpluses translate into large changes in the prices farmers receive for their products. Consumers usually do not appreciate the magnitude of such fluctuations because only one-third of the average dollar consumers pay for food reflects the price of the products farmers sell.

Public policies and competition among farmers have increased the supply of farm products faster than the demand for them. New seed varieties, improved pest controls, and better management methods developed by land-grant universities have increased agricultural productivity; public investments in infrastructure such as irrigation and transportation have increased farm output; and rising labor costs and the availability of nonfarm jobs have encouraged farmers to substitute machinery for labor. The result has been a chronic oversupply of farm products, which in turn has meant low farm prices and incomes.

The number of American farms peaked at 6.8 million in 1935, when one-quarter of the population lived on farms. Farmers had experienced low farm product prices and incomes since the 1920s, and books such as the *Grapes of Wrath* highlighted the misery of the farm sector which justified farm programs designed to increase and stabilize farm incomes.

Farm incomes can be supported directly or indirectly. Direct income support would entail having farmers produce and market their commodities and then report their incomes to the federal government. The government would then mail a check to the farmer for the difference between his actual income and a "fair" or "target" income. But farmers generally prefer "fair" prices to direct income support: direct subsidies are explicit, and nonfarmers might ask why farmers should have their incomes guaranteed by the government. So, federal farm programs sought to raise farm incomes indirectly by establishing minimum prices for basic farm commodities. In 1933, the federal government declared that wheat, corn, cotton, tobacco, rice, milk, and pork were basic commodities, and established programs that made the government the buyer of last resort for these commodities.

Fifty years later federal farm policies continue to establish minimum support prices for commodities such as wheat, corn, and rice. If farmers choose to participate in such programs, they pledge their harvested commodity to the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) in exchange for a year-long "nonrecourse loan" equal to the support price times the number of bushels. If wheat and corn prices rise, the farmer repays the loan and sells through private channels; if prices

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remain low, the farmer defaults and the CCC keeps the grain. Such minimum prices and loans are available for many other commodities, including cotton, rice, soybeans, wool, and honey.

In the case of milk, instead of loans, the federal government offers to buy unlimited amounts of milk products at announced prices, thus establishing a price floor for milk. In recent years, the federal government has been buying about 10 percent of U.S. milk products, storing them at an annual cost of over $2 billion, and disposing of some of the surplus through cheese giveaways.

Both loans and direct purchases make the federal government a last-resort buyer which acquires buffer stocks of basic commodities. If wholesale prices rise, these buffer stocks can be released to hold down consumer prices. If wholesale prices remain low, costs for buying and storing the surplus mount.

Money for nothing, wheat for free

But a guaranteed above-market price encourages more production, so support prices have to be accompanied by acreage reduction programs. Thus, farmers who want CCC loans must also agree to "set aside" some portion of their acreage which normally would be planted with wheat or corn. Wheat and corn production, however, usually falls less than predicted because farmers idle their least-productive land and apply extra fertilizer to the planted acreage.

The federal government cannot easily buy and store perishable commodities such as fruits, vegetables, and milk, so it permits farmers to impose marketing restrictions on themselves. A tentative program ("marketing order") is formulated to regulate product standards, to raise funds for research and promotion, or to regulate the flow of the commodity to retail buyers. If a majority of the commodity producers approve, all producers must abide by the restrictions or face federal sanctions for violating them. Most of the forty-seven federal marketing orders limit themselves to promotion and the enforcement of quality standards, but a few, including the California-Arizona orange and lemon orders, restrict the flow of the commodity to U.S. consumers.

Most farm programs influence the supply of commodities, but the federal government also increases the demand for farm products by giving away or subsidizing food purchases through the Food Stamp and School Lunch programs in the United States and the Food for Peace program abroad. The Food Stamp program, which cost $11.2 billion in 1983, distributes to poor people coupons that can only be used to purchase food (although recipients do in fact trade them for other goods and services). The Food for Peace pro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gram donates surplus commodities to some countries and offers subsidized credit to others.

Support prices and acreage reductions are the basic features of farm commodity programs. By the 1960s, it was clear that the support price had become the floor price, benefitting farmers who chose not to participate and reduce their acreages. The Kennedy administration proposed a program that would have required all wheat growers to participate and reduce their production, but such mandatory supply controls were rejected by farmers.

Instead of imposing mandatory supply controls, Congress created a two-tiered price support system, providing commodity support prices lower than the previous ones (but still above the free market price) for all producers, and a new set of higher commodity "target prices" to those farmers who agreed to reduce their acreage. This system established incentives for farmers to join the program and curtail production, while retaining minimal price supports for those who did not. Several years after a few farmers received large cash payments—in 1967 five farmers each received over $1 million—limits were placed on payments to farms, and are now no more than $50,000 per commodity. This payment cap has kept most of the very large farms out of federal commodity programs.

Feast or famine

The 1970s were the glory days of American agriculture. In the early years of the decade, a drought in the United States, energy price hikes and subsequent inflation, crop failures and policy changes in the Soviet Union, and devaluation of the dollar all prompted dramatic increases in exports, farm prices, and U.S. land values. Wheat and corn prices tripled between 1971 and 1974. Land prices rose 55 percent in the early 1970s and then doubled between 1975 and 1980. Farm exports jumped from $7 billion in 1970 to $41 billion in 1980, when the United States exported $24 billion more of farm products than it imported. Farmers and investors, convinced that the United States was the only country which could feed a hungry world, expected burgeoning exports to maintain high farm prices and land values.

The farm outlook dimmed in the 1980s, however, when Argentina, the European Economic Community, and other nations began producing and exporting more grains in response to higher prices. The strong dollar made American grains more expensive to developing nations mired in recession and debt. Farm prices fell as real interest rates reached historic highs, and the inflationary pressures

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that had propped up land prices and supported the mounting farm debt ebbed. The ambitious farmers who had expanded saw the value of their land shrinking, and they sought federal assistance.

Farm prices fell again in 1982, and still more farmers participated in government commodity programs. The direct costs of farm programs rose, and the government accumulated burdensome stocks of wheat and corn. When farmers pressed for relief, the Reagan administration responded in 1983 with the Payment-in-Kind (PIK) program, a massive acreage-reduction scheme. PIK transferred about $19 billion in cash payments and $9 billion worth of surplus crops to farmers who reduced their plantings. The PIK program was the most expensive farm program in U.S. history—in 1983, the average commercial farm received a transfer of almost $30,000 from the government. (Many commercial farms did not participate, so the average payment to participating farms was even larger.)

PIK was only a temporary respite for farmers. Farm prices sank further in 1984 and 1985, and interest burdens and declining land values pushed some troubled farmers toward bankruptcy. When Congress began a new debate over farm programs in 1985, it heard, as was mentioned earlier, contradictory recommendations. Almost all commentators agreed that current farm programs had become inappropriate for today's agriculture, but critics disagreed on whether more or less government intervention was required. However, one common thread running through the 1985 debate was the implications of the integration of American agriculture into the United States and world economies.

Growing money

The price support and acreage-reduction mechanisms developed in the 1930s helped to transfer monies from the nonfarm to the farm sector and labor from farms to industry, back when farming was largely a domestic enterprise. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, farm exports just exceeded imports—in 1969, the agricultural trade surplus was only $1.1 billion. In the early 1970s, exports surged, and the agricultural trade surplus rose to a peak of $26.6 billion in 1981. Today, the U.S. exports more than half of its wheat and cotton, almost half of its soybeans and rice, and one-third of its corn.

During the 1950s and 1960s, American agriculture was largely insulated from domestic and international economic policies. The domestic economy was relatively stable, and changes in the U.S. money supply had only minimal effects on the farm sector. Fiscal policies influenced the government's willingness to support farm

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prices and incomes, but the major impact of macroeconomic policies during these years was their effect on the unemployment rate: Farmers left agriculture when nonfarm jobs were plentiful.

Farming became increasingly integrated into the domestic economy through its reliance on machinery, chemicals, and other items purchased from nonfarm suppliers. Historically, family farms had been independent enterprises that made many of the items needed to farm. This independence permitted farmers to "tighten their belts" when farm prices and incomes were low. But the share of farm supplies which were purchased began rising during the 1920s when tractors replaced mules, and jumped after World War II with further mechanization and the availability of new seeds and chemicals. Today, a farm operation is similar to a manufacturing enterprise: The farmer buys machines, seeds, and fertilizers, adds his labor and land, and sells the output.

U.S. agriculture was integrated into the international economy in the 1970s because of expanded exports and flexible exchange rates. The introduction of flexible exchange rates and the emergence of an international capital market meant that domestic policy decisions were quickly translated into changing interest rates and a new value of the dollar. For example, when the money supply was tightened in 1979, U.S. interest rates and the dollar rose, causing U.S. economic activity and exports to constrict in 1980-81. Indebted farmers were hurt in two ways—they had to shoulder higher interest burdens with commodities that were worth less.

During the 1970s, most American farmers got much richer because the value of farmland doubled from $500 billion to $1 trillion. The average commercial farmer enjoyed capital gains of $500,000, and many ambitious farmers borrowed money to buy more land. This borrow-and-buy strategy was rational and profitable during the late 1970s, when interest rates averaged 7 percent and land prices appreciated at an annual rate of over 25 percent. However, interest expenses rose with the mounting farm debt, so that those expenses exceeded income from farm assets by the early 1980s. With expenses greater than income, and few prospects of a surge in inflation or farm exports to push up land and farm prices, some farmers now face bankruptcy. This bankruptcy threat illustrates how today's farm problems influence the development of the detailed farm legislation that will prevail through 1989.

Economic problems, political solutions

American farmers owe $210 billion: 35 percent of that amount is owed to the Farm Credit System, 25 percent to commercial banks,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the rest to insurance companies, other government agencies, and individuals. The Farm Credit System consists of twelve regional banks, each with a lending arm for land, short-term production loans, and farm cooperatives; observers predict that 15 percent of the system's $74 billion loans to farmers may be uncollectable. Predictions of record 1985 crops and continued low farm prices, farm debt problems, and the prospect of the 1986 elections soon turned congressional debate away from the Reagan administration's demand that income transfers to farmers be reduced and towards congressional proposals for government bailouts of farm lenders. Despite a four-year farm bill enacted in 1981 that was predicted to cost the federal government $11 billion but actually cost $63 billion, the 1985 farm debate that began with intentions of reducing farm program costs soon turned into a discussion of whether $10 billion or $20 billion annually would be enough to save the family farm.

American farm programs that raise farm prices and idle acreage are counterproductive because other nations expand their farm production on the knowledge that U.S. farm programs establish price floors for wheat, corn, and other commodities that are traded. As Congress raises farm prices to help U.S. farmers and mandates acreage reductions to reduce farm program costs, Argentina and the EEC expand their production of wheat and feed grains. The United States is the largest exporter of such commodities, so congressionally established minimum farm prices become world prices, enabling foreign farmers to produce as much as they can under the U.S. price support umbrella.

The United States and Western Europe are net food exporters, while most of the developing nations of Asia, Africa, and South America are net food importers. The populations and eating habits of industrial nations are relatively stable, and farm productivity continues to increase, so the main hopes of U.S. and European farmers for higher prices are increased demand in the developing world or continued subsidies from the nonfarm sector.

Developing nations did dramatically increase their food imports in the 1970s, but their debt problems have forced them to reduce food imports in the 1980s. These nations are uncertain prospects for U.S. farmers because of limited foreign exchange, goals of food self-sufficiency, and irrational agricultural policies. For example, many African nations require farmers to produce and sell cotton or cocoa to a government agency which offers a below world market price. The government often uses this tax on farmers to import commodities which are distributed to urban consumers at subsidized prices. Such rural taxes and urban subsidies create incentives to migrate to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cities of the Third World, but the resulting congestion rarely accelerates economic growth.

United States farmers have an export market only if developing nations can export enough to earn the foreign exchange needed to buy U.S. commodities. If developing nations modify their farm policies, their own domestic production temporarily increases enough to reduce or eliminate the need for imported food. However, as incomes continue to rise, consumers switch from bread and rice to meat and other livestock products, so that industrializing nations such as Korea and Taiwan have emerged as major markets for U.S. soybeans and feed grains. Still, most developing nations have not adopted the agricultural policies necessary to increase food production or promote industrial sectors that can earn the foreign exchange needed to import U.S. grains, so an expanded market for U.S. commodities in such countries frequently depends on food aid.

As long as export markets in developing nations remain uncertain, American and European farmers must look to taxpayers for subsidies or face a restructured agricultural sector. European farmers are guaranteed higher-than-world prices for commodities such as sugar, dairy products, and wheat, and the European Economic Community spends two-thirds of its budget to subsidize exports of the surplus. American farmers receive loans and cash payments in exchange for reduced production, and they have maintained substantial political clout despite their diminished numbers. This political power is reinforced by alliances with rural bankers, fertilizer producers and machinery companies, and food processors. As Congress began to debate the farm bill in 1985, stories of farm bankruptcies convinced 65 percent of the respondents in one poll to agree that it was a "bad idea" to reduce farm aid in order to cut the federal deficit. Some farm organizations continue to demand government-supported prices that are 100 percent of "parity"—meaning that a bushel of wheat should have the same purchasing power today that it had between 1910 and 1914. Even though farm subsidies transfer tax monies to a group with above average incomes, the ability of farmers to retain their subsidies cannot be underestimated.

What are our real goals?

The political process has continued price and income subsidies because farm policy has no clearly articulated goals. In earlier decades there was much discussion and debate over farm policy goals and alternative means of achieving them. However, during the 1985 debate, goals were rarely mentioned or debated. Clarifying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

three traditional goals—saving family farms, assuring an adequate supply of food, and preserving land and water for future generations—illustrates how farm policy might be reformed.

Although preservation of the "family farm" has been the favorite catch-phrase of politicians and farm policy spokesmen for more than half a century, present policies do not preserve family farms. Furthermore, the United States is no closer to a precise definition of what a family farm is than it was fifty years ago. Most definitions of family farming stress three features: a farmer owns or is buying the land being farmed; a family lives on and manages the farm; and the farm is operated with little or no hired labor.

During the 1930s and 1940s American agriculture was comprised largely of farms that satisfied one or all of these conditions. Today the picture has changed. Over half of the nation's cropland is farmed by someone other than the owner; almost half of all farmers report that they are primarily engaged in a nonfarm occupation; and hired workers do about 35 percent of the farm work. Price support programs do not forestall further movement away from the traditional family farm, and may actually hasten it.

Provision of adequate supplies of food and fiber at reasonable prices is another traditional goal of farm policy. But even the complete elimination of price support programs would not threaten achievement of this goal. Despite production restrictions, the United States produces enough for domestic needs and has a surplus of 30 to 40 percent to export. Most farmland will remain in production even if farm prices go down further. In spite of the financial problems that have plagued American agriculture during the past few years, there is no evidence that any significant amount of farm acreage has been idled, suggesting that adjustment to changed market conditions is reflected in reduced land prices rather than by leaving land idle.

Long-term preservation of land and water resources is a third goal that can be traced to Theodore Roosevelt's administration. Current commodity programs, however, work against this goal. By encouraging maximum yields per acre and by failing to discourage "sod-busters," commodity programs have encouraged the farming of highly erodible soils. Furthermore, these programs are at best indifferent to extensive use of irrigation and chemicals. Irrigation threatens the long-term stability of some aquifers, and chemicals threaten the quality of the water in rivers and reservoirs into which water from irrigated acres drain.

A farm policy which addresses these goals could include an income assurance program for family farmers, maintenance of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

public research system, and elimination of acreage controls. Some family farms might be preserved by a policy that provides "income assurance" targeted specifically to family farms. Income assurance could mitigate the effects of low farm prices by bringing the incomes of eligible family farmers part of the way toward a target income. The program might, for example, operate only for mid-size farms, those with gross sales between $40,000 and $200,000. If properly designed, such a program need not preserve inefficient farms, because economies of size in agriculture are largely exhausted by farms that sell about $200,000 worth of products. However, the program would reduce for family farmers some of the financial risks associated with the inherent instability of agricultural product markets.

Long-term adequacy of food and fiber supplies is dependent more on public and private research than on commodity programs. Such research and related extension programs should continue, not only to assure domestic food supplies but also to maintain American agriculture as a world-class industry. The income assurance program could provide the means for farmers to innovate, and competition among family farmers and between family and larger farmers would create the incentive to apply new knowledge and techniques. If farm prices fall to market-determined levels, American consumers would continue to enjoy reasonable food costs. Furthermore, the price "umbrella" that U.S. policy has erected to shelter foreign competitors would be removed, improving trade prospects for American farm products.

Elimination of acreage controls would place less emphasis on land as the constraining resource in production, leading to more extensive use of land on all classes of farms. Provisions requiring appropriate soil and water use practices as a condition for participation in the income assurance program should be an integral part of a revised farm policy. Local and regional land- and water-use regulations should be strengthened to prevent nonconserving practices by other farm operators.

A transition to the free market which is cushioned by an income assurance program for family farmers is not a complete farm policy. But it does suggest a route by which we might move away from the commodity-based programs to a new set of policies more consistent with perceived goals and with the economic realities of a modern, international American agriculture.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Religion and Traditional Values in Public School Textbooks

PAUL C. VITZ

WHILE MEDIA ATTENTION has recently focused on efforts in California to reject some proposed public school textbooks because of their inadequate treatment of the theory of evolution, a different textbook dilemma has gone largely unnoticed. This is the bias against any mention, pro or con, of religion, of traditional family values, and of conservative positions in a variety of areas.

Let me describe what one finds—or doesn't find—when one examines social studies textbooks. I looked at ten sets of six books each, the offerings of ten publishers for Grades 1-6. The selection included all social studies texts adopted by the states of California and Texas. These two states were selected because of their large school-age populations and because many other states look to their adoption lists for guidance in selecting their own texts. In addition, texts adopted by both the states of Georgia and Florida were included. The ten-set sample is representative of the nation as a whole, accounting for an estimated 70 to 75 percent of texts used in the country. Furthermore, there is no reason to think that the five or six fairly common texts that are not in the sample are very different from those in the sample; in fact, one of the characteristics of public school textbooks is how similar most of them are.

Specifically, all of the ten sets of books in the sample have the same general structure. Grade 1 texts deal with the individual student in the family and school setting; Grade 2 texts expand the setting, usually to include the student's neighborhood; Grade 3 texts expand the context further to include the life of the surrounding community; and Grade 4 texts include different regions of the country or of the world.

The books for these first four grades also include aspects of American history or world culture. Because of the homogeneity of the sets for the first four grades, they are analyzed together, while the Grade 5 and 6 books are each treated separately below. We should keep in mind that these social studies books are aimed at introducing the student to American society as it exists today and, to a lesser degree, how it existed in the past.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In examining the first set of books for Grades 1-4, any references to religion are described as "text items" if they are made with words and as "image items" if they occur in pictures. Each page of each book was evaluated. *Primary religious references* are defined as those that refer in words or pictures to a religious activity such as praying, going to church, participating in a religious ceremony, or giving religious instruction. *Secondary religious references* are those that refer to religion in some indirect way, such as mentioning the date a church was built, or referring to a minister as part of the community, or showing some Amish in a buggy. Differentiating the two categories was simple, and was verified by having the texts and scoring checked by independent readers furnished by an outside educational research organization.

THE FIRST NOTABLE FINDING of the study is that none of the books has a single *text* reference to a primary religious activity occurring in contemporary American life. The closest any book comes is a descriptive reference to the life of the Amish—a small, rural Protestant group whose distinctive way of life has not changed in centuries, and who are certainly not representative of today's religious Americans. Another reference that comes "close" to describing primary religious activity is about a Spanish urban ghetto, "El Barrio." The complete relevant text reads: "Religion is important for people in El Barrio. Churches have places for dances and sports events."

There are, however, a few *images* showing primary religious activity in a contemporary American setting. In Grade 1 texts, two images are Jewish, one is Catholic, and there is a rather vaguely drawn picture of a minister or priest at a funeral. In the Grade 2 texts there is one Jewish image and a photograph of a family praying at a Thanksgiving dinner (nondenominational). The primary religious images in Grade 3 texts are a Catholic priest, a rabbi, a minister or priest (with collar) at a sick bed, and a family with heads bowed for Thanksgiving. The Grade 4 texts have no primary religious images dealing with contemporary American society. These ten primary religious images referring to contemporary American life are distributed over forty books and roughly ten thousand pages. If we include the one primary religious image in the twenty books for Grades 5 and 6 the situation is even worse: For all six grades, eleven primary religious images are distributed over sixty books and over approximately fifteen thousand pages.

We find a similar but less extreme pattern in secondary religious references. In the Grade 1 books surveyed, there is one text reference to God in the Pledge of Allegiance. Secondary images include a church noted on a local map, a boy in bed with a crucifix on the wall behind him (implicitly Catholic), two images of Christmas trees, and one of children dyeing Easter eggs. Since Christmas trees and Easter eggs by themselves are found in many nonreligious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

homes, their religious significance is ambiguous and minor. In the Grade 2 books there is one text reference to the Amish, the Pledge of Allegiance is given twice (including the words "one nation, under God"), and in one instance the music and words of "America the Beautiful" are printed with "God shed his grace on thee"; there is also a text reference to a church building. Secondary religious images are pictures of churches; of the Amish people; six churches on local maps; and a photo, without a caption, of a wedding party with a cross in the background.

All text references to religion in the Grade 1-4 books are secondary. The name of God, for example, appears only in such things as the Pledge of Allegiance, but there are occasional photographs of a church or Spanish missions, and even some religious images of the Pilgrims; one book refers to ministers as important community members.

When these books cover other societies, however, religion gets a substantially greater emphasis. Thus, many of the books treat American Indian life prior to the arrival of Europeans; in the process, Indian religion often gets a sympathetic treatment. For example, one book describes a Hopi rain dance and prayer; another notes a Pueblo Indian story about prayer and how the Earth Mother created corn for them. Religious life is sometimes noted in the study of Mexican society. But these occasional acknowledgments of religious life in other societies create the impression that religion is foreign, exotic, or a quaint old world tradition. This view is expressed in the following comment about European society: "As you see, in Europe many people are religious." That this is much more true now of the United States than Europe is never suggested.

Nor do these textbooks suggest that religion plays a part in American festive culture. "Mardi Gras," we read, "is the end of winter celebration." The Thanksgiving holiday usually, but not always, receives similar secular treatment. The Pilgrims, we learn from one text, "are people who make long trips." Nowhere in relating the story of the first Thanksgiving is it explained to whom the Pilgrims were giving thanks. The closest these books come is an image or two of Pilgrims praying. In one text that devotes thirty pages to the Pilgrims no reference is made to their religion in any way and we learn only that Thanksgiving was celebrated because the Pilgrims "wanted to give thanks for all they had." (A mother whose child was in a class using this book wrote to me to say that she was told by her child that Thanksgiving was when "the Pilgrims gave thanks to the Indians." The mother called the principal and "reminded" the principal that Thanksgiving was when the Pilgrims thanked God. The principal of this New York suburban school said "that was only her opinion," and that the schools could only teach what was in their history books.)

Clearly these textbooks are averse to discussing religious ritual —at least when it takes place on American soil. A Pueblo's prayers

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to Mother Earth can be described in these books, but Pilgrim prayer —or, for that matter, Christian prayer—is never described in the United States or elsewhere, present or past.

ALL TEN PUBLISHERS' Grade 5 textbooks are introductions to American history. The overwhelming impression made by all these books is the superficiality of their treatment of just about everything. They are a pastiche of topics without any serious historical treatment of what might have been going on. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the coverage of religion deserve special notice. Not one book notes the importance of religion in American history. There is not one reference in any of these books to such religious events as the Salem Witch Trials, the Great Awakening of the 1740s, the revivals of the 1830s and 1840s, the great urban revivals of the 1870-1890 period, the Holiness and Pentecostal movements around 1880-1910, the liberal and conservative Protestant split in the early twentieth century, or the "Born Again" movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, religion in the last hundred or so years hardly figures at all in these books—the whole topic is ignored.

This omission reflects a seriously declining role for religion in the presentation by these textbooks of each successive century of American history. The average text, for example, has 24.5 pages covering the history of the 1600s; the percentage of these pages containing *any* reference in word or image to religion is slightly more than 50 percent. For the pages covering the 1700s, the percentage drops to 9.75, and for the 1800s, to 3.42. By the 1900s references to religion in American history decline to an average of 1.27 references every one hundred pages.

The ten social studies texts for Grade 6 all briefly cover either world history or world cultures with history mixed in. Because these books differ in the particular historical periods, countries, and cultures that are covered, it is hard to compare them systematically. However, some generalizations are possible. There is far less coverage of ancient (that is, biblical) Jewish history than of either Egyptian or Greek history in these books. Nor is there any further reference to Jewish life and culture for two thousand years, until the Holocaust. In short, Jewish contributions to Western culture are seriously underrepresented.

A few books give Jesus some mention, but four out of ten make no mention whatsoever of either his life or teaching. One text provides the following *complete* description of Jesus' life: "Jesus became a teacher. He preached that there was only One God. He told those who would listen that they must honor God by treating others with love and forgiveness." In several books Mohammed's life gets much more coverage than that of Jesus. For example, in one text the life of Jesus gets 36 lines, while the life of Mohammed gets 104 lines. In another the rise of Islam, Islamic culture and Mohammed get an eleven-page section plus other scattered coverage. The rise of Chris-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tianity receives but a few lines on one page. In these three or four books it is not as though great religious figures are totally avoided —rather, Jesus is.

One strange characteristic of many of the texts in the study is their failure to mention the Reformation, or to give it little emphasis. For example, one book has 20 pages on Tanzania, 19 pages on the history of the Netherlands, and 16 pages on ancient Crete—but makes no reference to Martin Luther and John Calvin and has almost nothing on Protestantism. (The total absence of reference to Protestantism in the section on Holland is particularly noteworthy given that country's history.) Even the texts that do take up the Reformation usually do not discuss the theological differences that were at issue. Religious differences, the fundamental basis of the conflict, are typically omitted.

Curiously, when religious events are focused upon in some texts, a feminist emphasis, projected onto the distant past, is often evident. The few women of influence in the past are mentioned, even featured, out of proportion to their historical significance. For example, one text mentions that Muslims kept women out of power, and then features the one known sultanate of a Muslim woman (it lasted four years). A particularly egregious example of this tendency is one book's treatment of Joan of Arc, whose story is told without any reference to religion in any way. The coverage is entirely secular and seems to have been included because Joan of Arc was an important woman.

THE SECOND PART of the survey of social studies textbooks examined the treatment of family and traditional family values. Since the Grade 5 and 6 books address U.S. history and world history and culture, these books were excluded as irrelevant to the issue of family values in America. This study, then, involved only the books for Grades 1-4—books purporting to introduce the child to an understanding of U.S. society.

The books vary greatly in their emphasis on family. For example, the Grade 4 texts, because of their focus on geography, often have no representation of family life at all. Grades 1-3 texts usually have some, and often a strong, representation of family; every publisher has at least one book with a moderate (six-to-fifteen pages) family emphasis. Thus, in terms of amount of family emphasis, most of these sets do well.

But serious issues arise when one looks at the *kind* of family emphasis—when one moves from quantity to quality. These books are extremely cautious when attempting to give an explicit definition of a family. For example, one text states, "A family is a group of people." The teacher's edition of this book elaborates the definition so as to make a family a group of people "who identify themselves as family members." The entire emphasis in all these books is on the many types of family—all implicitly equally legitimate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

More typically, however, no explicit definition of a family is given by these books. Instead an implicit definition is provided by the pictures and stories referring to family life. In these cases the definition suggested by the images is that a family consists of those people, whoever they might be, that the child lives with. Specifically, there is not one text reference to marriage as the foundation of the family. Indeed, the words "marriage" or "wedding" occur not once in the forty books. (The one exception occurs in a reference to a neighbor's wedding—but this occurs in a short treatment of life in Spain.) Further, it is relevant to note that neither the word "husband" nor the word "wife" occurs once in any of these books. Not one of the many families described in these books features a homemaker—that is, a wife and mother as a model. The words "housewife" and "homemaker" never occur in these books. Yet there are countless references to mothers and other women working outside of the home in occupations such as medicine, law, transportation, and politics.

In the course of reading these books, certain observations were made that had not been anticipated. For example, there is a liberal bias to these social studies texts. Many of these books single out certain prominent people for special emphasis. These people are not necessary for the discussion of social life or the history of the United States (like presidents), but are considered by the authors to be important people who would interest the students. Such people are selected to serve as "role models" for students, since they are usually featured under such headings as "Famous People" or "Someone You Should Know" or "People Who Made a Difference." In one study, people whose major contributions have occurred since World War II were specifically noted. A person was scored as a political "role model" if he is singled out for distinctive biographical treatment and if the person was active in political life or well known for his political or ideological significance. (People selected as role models in the arts, from sports, and from the world of science are therefore not included in this analysis.) In most cases explicit political issues are not raised. That is, their political party is never mentioned, but the general message of approval for their contributions is clear. Table I lists all of these role models. Comment would seem superfluous.

IN ANOTHER STUDY I examined how religion and other traditional values are represented in basal readers, the books used to teach children how to read. These books most often use fictional stories, but articles about science and biographical pieces are also common. The purpose of these texts is to develop reading ability. Since basal readers are introduced at an early and critical stage of a child's education, these stories and articles become an important source of values, ideas, and information for students.

Because the earlier readers have little content and the later read-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Table I. Role Models in Public School Textbooks[a]

Name	*Accomplishment*
Herman Badillo	New York politician
Romana Banuelos	Treasurer of the U.S.
Thomas Bradley (2 times)	Mayor, Los Angeles
Ralph Bunche	U.N. Official
Rachel Carson (2 times)	Ecology movement
Raul Castro	Governor of Arizona
Henry Cisneros	Mayor, San Antonio
Vine DeLoria	American Indian rights
Millicent Fenwick	U.S. Congress, N.J.
Ella Grasso	Governor of Connecticut
Patricia Harris	Lawyer; black rights
Dolores Huerta	United Farm Workers
Nancy Kassebaum	U.S. Senate, Kansas
Maggie Kuhn	Gray Panthers; feminist
Martin L. King, Jr. (3 times)	Civil rights leader
Clare Booth Luce	Ambassador
Thurgood Marshall	Supreme Court Justice
Margaret Mead (2 times)	Anthropologist
Patsy Mink	U.S. Congress, Hawaii
Julian Nava	Ambassador to Mexico, author
Dixy Lee Ray	Governor of Washington
Eleanor Roosevelt (3 times)	Founder of U.N., various good works
Coleman Young	Mayor, Detroit

[a] All people of post-World War II political and social significance selected for special biographical emphasis (Role Models) in the sixty social studies textbooks for Grades 1-6 which were surveyed.

ers are not widely used, the basal readers from the middle grades are the most appropriate for content analysis. I chose to analyze readers from Grade 3 and Grade 6 in order to obtain a representative range of widely used material. The eleven publishers selected account for all the readers used in California and Texas and a high percentage of the readers used nationwide. The sample is thus a representative survey of the stories and articles read by our country's public school children.

Only stories or articles were scored; poems, games, exercises, reviews, and similar material were not evaluated. However, such items, which are harder to evaluate and compare, are always a relatively small part of the total content of each book. Stories and articles usually take up anywhere from 75 to 90 percent of the pages. Scoring consisted of the author or an assistant reading each story or article in each book and writing a brief summary. All references to religion were specifically noted. Later I read all the stories and articles scored by the assistant to gain first-hand familiarity with the complete sample.

An independent analyst read all the stories in four of the readers to check on the accuracy of the author's summaries. This analyst found only one story out of 140 that had reference to religion of any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

significance that was missed. (This story had one sentence that mentioned the "good Lord.") Thus, although a few stray religious references might have been missed in the twenty-two-book sample, these possible oversights would not change any of the major conclusions. In addition, the conclusions and results mentioned below were evaluated for accuracy by the independent evaluator.

For all intents and purposes religion is excluded from these basal readers. There is not one story or article in all these books in which the central motivation or major content is connected to Judeo-Christian religion. No character has a primary religious motivation. Indeed, religious motivation is significant, although of secondary concern, in only five or six stories or articles (1 percent of the total). In additional instances, religion enters into a story in a minor or secondary way, but without any narrative importance. No informative article deals with religion as a primary subject worthy of treatment. There are many articles about animals, archaeology, fossils, and magic, but none on religion, much less about Christianity.

IN CONTRAST to the treatment of Christianity and Judaism, there was a minor spiritual or occult emphasis in a number of stories about American Indians. One fifty-five-page story features a typical white American girl on a ranch in California who seeks to find her "Indian Heart." The girl makes several animal fetishes and seeks ways to commune with animal spirits in an attempt to capture the spirit of the animal, in this case a coyote. Another story called "Medicine Bag" features an Indian medicine bag passed on from father to son; the bag is part of an Indian youth's "Vision Quest" in which he seeks the meaning of his name. An article about Comanche medicine art gives an interpretation of the paintings but also information about Indian spirituality.

Although biblical religion figures rarely in basal readers, it is worth examining the few instances in which Christianity or Judaism is described. In some stories, for example, a Roman Catholic theme can be detected. A biography of the Mayo brothers (who established the Mayo Clinic) mentions that an order of Catholic nuns was instrumental in setting up the Mayos' first hospital, St. Mary's. A story about the famous battle at the Alamo, described as a mission church in Texas, has a young boy refer to the church and to Our Lady of Guadalupe and has the boy's mother praying for the safety of her husband during the battle. This story is an exception among other basal reader stories in that the mother actively prays and the son makes a positive comment about Our Lady of Guadalupe and his own church. (The religious meaning of these actions, however, is somewhat ambiguous since the mother's prayers are ineffectual and her husband is killed along with the rest of the defenders.)

The only other cases in which prayer is mentioned are in two stories, each with a single sentence that describes how a major character prays (but not to whom) at a time of extreme danger. In another

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

story, a man rescued after days of living alone on a large iceberg shouts in German his delight in being saved, "Gott im Himmel!"

A story by the Jewish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer set in nineteenth-century Eastern Europe in a small village has a minor religious theme. It takes place during the celebration of Hanukkah and involves a Jewish boy who gets lost for three days in a blizzard with the family goat. Once in the story he prays, but God is not mentioned. (In the original story the boy prayed "to God" and remarked, "Thank God." But in the school reader the first reference is deleted and the second is changed to "Thank goodness.") The celebration of Hanukkah is an important background context for the story, but the religious meaning of Hanukkah is not evident and for most young readers it could be just another ethnic holiday.

There is another Jewish story that centers on the mother making gefilte fish (from a live carp kept in the bathtub) for Passover. God is mentioned once, but no reference is made to the religious meaning of Passover, and the focus of the article is on the poor fish. Passover, like Hanukkah in the previous story, could be a strictly secular ethnic holiday as far as the text is concerned.

Religion gets a neutral or positive mention in a few stories on black history or black life. One story refers to information in the family Bible of Benjamin Banneker; another refers to the "good Lord" once; and a story about a black teenager mentions that his father was a minister. A fourth story is a history of the origin and development of jazz (by far one of the better pieces in all twenty-two books). This history correctly and positively identifies the importance of the black church in the development of black music. A story on Harriet Tubman helping slaves escape via the underground railway mentions her prayer and two ministers, one a Quaker, as important in the escape. There is a biographical story on the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. that mentions he was a minister, discusses his studies at a seminary, and quotes his "Thank God, I'm free at last" speech.

However, certain nontraditional religions receive relatively frequent mention. The Greek and Roman religions are part of six stories; two stories that are not particularly religious in content are attributed to Buddha. American Indian religion is also featured positively in five stories and one article. Bible stories, however—even popular ones such as David and Goliath—never appear in these books.

In summary, then, we see very little representation of religion in these basal readers. While Catholicism, Judaism, and the black church—that is, "minority religions"—receive occasional minor representation, Protestantism is omitted completely. Seventy-two percent of those basal readers sampled either have no reference at all or only minor negative or neutral reference to God, Christianity, or Judaism. Of the remaining books, two or three contain modest references. Although it makes no mention of Judaism or representative Protestantism, one reader does introduce religion into eight of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the book's forty stories, and, hence, gives religion about half of all the coverage found in the complete sample.

I REVIEW BRIEFLY some of the other trends we observed in the 670 stories and articles that were surveyed.

For all practical purposes the concept of patriotism is absent from these books. Less than 1 percent of the stories have any patriotic theme—all from the War of Independence. The most popular of these is the story of Sybil Ludington in 1777, which appeared three different times: Dressed as a man, Ludington warns local pro-Independence farmers about a British threat. One other story with a patriotic theme is the story of Mary, a black girl who wants to join the army and bring food to George Washington's troops during the harsh winter at Valley Forge. In many respects these four of the five total patriotic stories could also be described as feminist.

The second notable omission is the role of business in American life. Almost no stories in the textbooks have a business theme of any kind. One reasonably probusiness article is about a black youth who bought a house in a run-down part of town, fixed it up, and became the youngest landlord in Michigan. Here, the positive emphasis is on good citizenship, not on business success. However, there are no stories about Henry Ford, Andrew Carnegie, or any more recent examples of this "Horatio Alger" type. Neither is there a single story in which an immigrant to this country finds happiness and success in business or in a profession.

The only actual business success story features a black woman from Richmond, Virgina, born in 1867, named Maggie Mitchell Walker. This story—which appeared in three different readers—does make the point that she became a successful banker, but the major emphasis is on her success as a woman. The meaning of her accomplishment is in overcoming prejudice in black men against women (no white prejudice against blacks was noted since all the characters in the story were black). Even the life of American workers goes unmentioned; there are no stories about labor or labor unions either.

BY FAR THE MOST NOTICEABLE ideological position in the readers is a feminist one, which shows in a number of ways. To begin with, certain themes do not occur in these stories and articles. There is hardly a story that celebrates motherhood or marriage as a positive goal or as a rich and meaningful way of living. (The few that are positive about motherhood are set in the past or feature ethnic mothers.) No story shows any woman or girl with a positive relationship to a baby or a young child; no story deals with a girl's positive relationship with a doll; no picture shows a girl with a baby or doll.

Even romance receives short shrift. Only five stories focus on romance: One involves two dogs; another, an O. Henry story, deals with a young man and a young woman who have fallen out over a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

misunderstanding that the story resolves; and a third features a young black girl who daydreams that a popular singer will fall in love with her. A fourth story has a loving prince win the hand of a princess even though she has apparently changed into a cat. A fifth story involves a captured Confederate officer. His new wife, dressed as a man, tries to rescue him from prison and almost succeeds, but in the end the officer is killed and she is caught and hanged. The emphasis is more on her daring attempted rescue of her husband than on romance. Great literature from Shakespeare to Jane Austen to Louisa May Alcott is filled with romance and the desire to marry, but one finds very little of that in these texts.

Many stories focus on the role-reversal of their heroine. In one story, a princess sets out to slay the dragon in her kingdom; she invents the first gun and with it kills him. The slain dragon turns into a prince who asks the princess to marry him. She rather casually agrees, but only if her new kingdom has lots of dragons in it for her to slay and lots of drawbridges for her to fix—she wants to keep busy at such things. There is not one traditional story of a prince rescuing a princess or slaying a dragon. Indeed, stories set in the past featuring sex-role reversal and mockery of traditional stories about kings and queens or about young men rescuing maidens are surprisingly common.

Other examples of strongly feminist stories include a story about a new kid on the block who wins at "King of the Hill" and other boyish activities and turns out to be a girl, and a dog sled race between a girl and a boy where the girl turns back to rescue the boy when he gets in trouble and still manages to beat him to the finish line. There is also a story of a star baseball player—a girl—who is in a hitting slump because her favorite "Rusty McGraw" bat is missing. Her friend, a girl detective, solves the problem by finding that a boy has stolen it so he could make the first team instead of the girl. At the end she gets her bat back and hits two home runs. (In stories in which boys and girls competed, the girls won by an overwhelming margin.) Yet another example is the story, found in two readers, of "Trail Boss," a girl who drives longhorn cattle back from Texas to Illinois. Finally, in one astonishing instance, a mystery featuring Encyclopedia Brown—the boy detective in a series of popular children's books—is rewritten so that Encyclopedia is a girl.

The frequent stories of female success in these books are typically set in traditionally male preserves. There are, for example, many stories about the female pilots Amelia Earhart and Harriet Quimby, while there is only one single-page story on the Wright Brothers, and there is no mention of Charles Lindbergh or any other male aviation pioneer.

There are also explicitly feminist stories about Elizabeth Blackwell, a leader of the women's movement, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the first female physician in the United States. These stories are much more factual than the feminist fiction pieces and address an

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

important historical movement. Because they are honest and straightforward in their purpose, they contrast sharply with the manipulative quality of the many other stories that distort history to include women soldiers, judges, or merchants at times and places where there were none.

WHEN ONE LOOKS at the total sample of 670 pieces in these basal readers, the following findings stand out. Serious Christian or Jewish religious motivation is featured nowhere. References to Christianity or Judaism are uncommon and typically superficial. In particular, Protestantism is excluded, at least for whites. Patriotism is close to nonexistent in the sample. Likewise, any appreciation of business success is seriously underrepresented. Traditional roles for both men and women receive virtually no support, while role-reversal feminist stories are common.

The above characteristics taken together make it clear that these basal readers, like the social studies texts, are so written as to present a systematic denial of the history, heritage, beliefs, and values of a very large segment of the American people.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CURRENT READING

Black America: Making It or Losing Ground?

It has been more than forty years since the publication of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*. In that work, Myrdal described the economic situation of blacks in 1944 America as "pathological":

> Except for a small minority enjoying upper or middle class status, the masses of American negroes . . . are destitute. They own little property; even their household goods are mostly inadequate and dilapidated. Their incomes are not only low but irregular. They thus live from day to day and have scant security for the future. Their entire culture and their individual interests and strivings are narrow.

How much has the situation of blacks changed since then? If "Closing the Gap: Forty Years of Economic Progress for Blacks," a recently issued report of the Rand Corporation, is any indication, dramatically: "Between 1940 and 1980, black male wages increased 52 percent faster than white. The typical black male worker in 1940 earned only 43 percent as much as his white counterpart; by 1980, the figure was 73 percent."

This improvement in the relative economic status of black men between 1940 and 1980, according to the report's authors, James P. Smith and Finis R. Welch, has been a "largely untold story." Yet its effects have been far-reaching. According to the data compiled by Smith and Welch:

- The growth in the size of the black middle class was so spectacular that as a group they now outnumber the black poor.
- For the first time in American history, a sizable number of black men are economically better off than white middle-class America.
- During the last twenty years alone, the odds of a black man penetrating the ranks of the economic elite increased tenfold.

The bulk of the Rand study is devoted to analyzing the causes of this black advancement relative to whites. Among contributing factors the study examines are:

- *Convergence in schooling:* During the last forty years, 60 percent of the education gap between the races has been elimi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nated. In 1940, the typical black worker had completed only 4.7 years of schooling; today, the majority of black men are high school graduates.

- *Migration:* Southern black migration to the more prosperous Northern cities increased black-white male wage ratios by 11 to 19 percent between 1940 and 1980.
- *Economic resurgence of the South:* Despite the great black migration to the North, the majority of blacks still reside in the South. The economic revival of this region, then, has proven to be somewhat of a boon for black Americans.
- *Waning discrimination against blacks in the South:* While blacks have been catching up with whites in all regions of the country, nowhere has their progress been more dramatic than in the South, suggesting that this region once known for being particularly racist may now be less so. Today, the racial wage gap is only 6 percent higher in the South, compared with the 20 percent differentials that prevailed before 1970.

One factor that has had apparently little long-run impact on the male racial wage gap, according to Smith and Welch, is affirmative action. Indeed, they found that the narrowing of the racial wage gap was as rapid in the twenty years prior to the onset of affirmative action as during the twenty years after, a situation suggesting that long-term black economic improvement has been primarily determined by the slowly evolving historical forces that enhance the labor market skills of blacks, not by quick-fix solutions that have emanated from public policy circles.

Though the past forty years for black America have been marked by impressive progress, the next forty years do not appear to hold as much promise. Wage benefits associated with migration to the North have proven to be a one-shot deal; today, in fact, many blacks find themselves mired in deteriorating inner cities. More ominous are the over 40 percent of black families that are female-headed, a level unprecedented in black America. A further cause of concern for Smith and Welch is the neglect in the public policy arena of "an old-fashioned truth that is now out of vogue: The safest and surest route to permanent black economic mobility lies in additional education in a good school." Smith and Welch argue, in closing, that "until we deal with the problem in our nation's black schools . . . further long-term reductions in black poverty will not materialize."

Smog and Death

Does New Jersey cause cancer? A famous National Cancer Institute study in the 1970s certainly seemed to say so, and the notion that the polluted, smog-filled Northeast was unhealthy compared to the rest of the country passed into the conventional wisdom. But according to Michael Greenberg of the School of Urban and Regional

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Policy at Rutgers University, the data in the report was misinterpreted, and the presumed correlation between cancer and geography which the study illustrated does not exist. In "Does New Jersey Cause Cancer?" in the Winter 1985/86 issue of *The Sciences*, Greenberg argues that *how* people live is far more important than *where*.

When the NCI published a seven-hundred-page volume of statistics on cancer mortality rates across America in 1974, few noticed. A year later, however, the data was rereleased as a set of sixty-five maps detailing the connections between cancer incidence and location, and one fact caught everyone's attention: Several counties in the Northeast leapt out from the maps in the danger colors of red and orange (indicating the nation's highest cancer rates), and "cancer alley," centered on New Jersey, was born.

The phenomenon of higher cancer rates in these areas than in the rest of the nation from 1950 to 1969 prompted fevered debate in scientific journals and supermarket tabloids. Several possible causes were suggested, ranging from indigenous fungi to cancerous migrants, but the popular favorite was clearly the contamination of the air and water in the afflicted states by man-made chemicals. Greenberg finds, however, that "a new analysis of the original NCI data demonstrates that there is no epidemic in New Jersey, that cancer alley, as a single isolated phenomenon, does not exist. Nor did it exist ten years ago when the term was coined." Despite what people may think, scientists say that outdoor pollution is responsible for only 1 percent of all cancers, while 60-90 percent of cancer fatalities can be directly linked to chronic smoking, poor nutrition, and regular exposure to carcinogens on the job. The remaining 10-40 percent of fatalities are probably caused by viral infections, alcohol consumption, and sexual behavior. As Greenberg puts it, "The most reasonable hypothesis . . . is that the life-styles of the citizens of cancer alley put them at risk."

If cultural factors have been the true causes of high cancer rates, since cultural patterns have diffused throughout the country over the past decade, then cancer rates should have converged. This is exactly what has happened. Tobacco smoking, for example, alone responsible for 35 percent of all malignancies, has decreased in the eastern metropolises where it first became fashionable and increased in the new cities of the South and West. In the early 1950s, four of the five cities with the highest respiratory cancer rates for white females were in the Northeast and Midwest; twenty years later, seven of eight cities with the highest rates were in the South and West. Of these, the top four cities had rates between 25 and 42 percent higher than the national average; for comparison, in 1950, at its highest during the original study's period, New Jersey's age-adjusted cancer rate for white males was only 23 percent higher than the national norm, and by 1969 had declined to only 10 percent higher.

Other factors, including inaccurate reporting, older (and hence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more cancer-prone) populations, and poor nutrition may have affected the cancer rates of the NCI study; nevertheless, it is clear that the primary causes of the differences that the study found lay in the behavior of the afflicted areas' inhabitants, not in the areas themselves. As American behavior patterns have grown more similar, so have cancer rates, and we now have the knowledge to interpret —and prevent—future "cancer alleys."

The Continuing Search for Hunger

In January of this year the Physician Task Force on Hunger (a project of the Harvard School of Public Health) issued a report proclaiming 150 "hunger counties"—areas in the country where people were experiencing the highest rates of hunger and nutritional deprivation. *Hunger Counties 1986* provoked much discussion in the media, which for the most part reported that hunger in America was a growing problem.

Support for the report, however, was not unanimous. Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Food and Consumer Services John W. Bode wrote to Harvard president Derek Bok charging that the report had been "executed with a gross disregard for basic scientific method." In February two congressman asked the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) to review its technical soundness.

In March, the GAO issued its review of the Harvard report, finding that its methodological limitations "severely damage the credibility of the results of *Hunger Counties 1986*." Yet despite this assessment, not a single newspaper article mentioned the review or its criticism of the much-publicized task force report!

The declared purpose of *Hunger Counties 1986* was "to promote greater understanding about the epidemic of hunger in America." In their introduction, the authors of the report explain that the study was initially undertaken to:

- document the distribution of counties with the worst poverty and poorest food stamp participation in the United States
- quantify the "hunger gap" among counties by comparing need to actual food stamp assistance provided for the nation's poorest families, and
- establish a basis for analyzing barriers to more effective utilization of this key food assistance program.

Determining the distribution of hunger in the U.S. is, of course, a serious matter that can provide important information for policy decisions. But the questions raised by the GAO review concerning the methodology used by the Physician Task Force puts into doubt any policy relevance *Hunger Counties 1986* may have.

To begin with, the GAO report looked at how the task force selected its 150 counties where hunger was widespread. The task force designated counties high in poverty and low in food stamp

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

participation as "hunger counties." A "low" participation rate in food stamp programs was deemed to be 33 percent or below of those eligible. Yet as the GAO report hastens to point out, there is no "right" or "wrong" food stamp participation rate, and therefore, no theoretical basis supporting a 33 percent cutoff value indicating "low" food stamp participation. The task force's decision, then, on which areas experienced the worst hunger was based in part on an arbitrary judgment.

Another flaw the GAO detected in the Physician Task Force's methodology, and perhaps the most crucial, was the *estimation* of the number of people eligible for food stamps in any given county. This guesswork was necessary since no data on the actual number is available. The GAO found that the task force may have seriously overestimated the number of eligible participants—and, hence, underestimated the percentage of actual participants—by using only income statistics to determine food stamp eligibility. The GAO suggests that approximately 25 percent of those eligible for food stamps on an income test are disqualified after an assets test. Had the Physician Task Force used an assets test (as is done in administering food stamp programs) on their 150 counties, perhaps as many as one-third would no longer rate the designation "hunger county."

The GAO report faults the task force not only for the methods used to identify the hungriest counties, but also for not measuring hunger directly in the sense of estimating the degree of chronic underconsumption of food. Rather, the task force equated hunger with low food stamp participation in high-poverty counties. But as the GAO suggests, one need only think of self-sufficient farmers or students dependent on their parents or those who have access to other government programs that provide funds for food to realize that those who are income poor may still have enough to eat without food stamps.

By assuming that the greatest hunger in the United States could be found by looking for those poor counties with low food stamp participation rates, the task force has failed, in the GAO's estimation, to establish that its 150 "hunger counties" are where the greatest incidence of hunger is to be found.

In response to the GAO report, J. Larry Brown, chairman of the Physician Task Force, claims that the GAO did not acknowledge that hunger even exists in the counties identified. "It is our opinion," he wrote, "that empty stomachs should not be ignored while those of us who are not hungry debate methodological finepoints." The authors of the GAO report responded as follows:

> We never contested the statement that hunger exists in the 150 counties. Hunger may very well exist in those counties as well as others; this was not the point. We believe, however, that the approach taken by the task force did not identify the counties in the greatest need of relief from hunger.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

•

CONTRIBUTORS

•

DON B. KATES, JR. is a civil liberties lawyer and criminologist. He is author of *Firearms and Violence: Issues of Public Policy* and also author of the entry on the Second Amendment in the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of the American Constitution*.

LAURENCE J. KOTLIKOFF is a professor of economics at Boston University.

ELMER W. LEARN, PHILIP L. MARTIN, and ALEX F. MCCALLA are professors of agricultural economics at the University of California, Davis.

MYRON LIEBERMAN is a professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Portions of his article are adapted and revised from his recent book, *Beyond Public Education*, published by Praeger.

CHARLES MURRAY is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

PAUL C. VITZ is a professor of psychology at New York University.

GAIL L. ZELLMAN is a research psychologist at the Rand Corporation. STEVEN L. SCHLOSSMAN, staff historian at the Rand Corporation, is currently on leave at the California State Department of Justice where he is doing an historical study on juvenile delinquency in Los Angeles. The views expressed in their article are their own and not necessarily shared by Rand or its research sponsors.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED